5 SURPRISING BEAUTY TRENDS OF THE PAST

IN SEARCH OF THE YETI

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WELCOME AUGUST 2023

Discover what life was really like as a medieval woman in this month's Essential Guide, which begins on page 27

The lives of ordinary medieval women have long been overlooked, with most individuals usually explored in terms of their relationships and interactions with men, as opposed to being deemed worthy historical subjects in their own right. But growing research into this field of history has been shedding new light on the roles played by women – both in and outside the home – across the Middle Ages. For this month's Essential Guide, **we've enlisted the help of expert Dr Eleanor Janega to reveal the bigger picture** – from tales of crusaders and literary trailblazers, to fascinating discussions regarding **work, religion and the perils of childbirth**. Turn to page 27 to get started.

Elsewhere, we explore the centuries-old hunt for the Yeti, the elusive hominoid creature said to roam the Himalayas (*page 58*). We also investigate the remarkable story of **the Chevalier d'Éon, the 18th-century soldier, diplomat and spy who chose to live as a woman at various points in his life** (*page 51*); examine what might have happened had George Washington and his Continental Army not escaped after the battle of Long Island in August 1776 (*page 64*); and **uncover some incredible facts about the history of beauty** - from the Renaissance penchant for receding hairlines, to the Egyptian love of eye makeup (*page 24*).

Plus, if you're struggling with the heat, check out our tips for staying cool the historical way in the next instalment of our new Life Hacks from History column (*page 17*).

See you next month!

Charlotte Hodgman
Editor

THIS MONTH'S BIG NUMBERS

24
The average age of a lower-class medieval woman when she got married

2bn
The estimated number of Chinese women who underwent the painful process of foot binding

<230
The number of people killed during the Japanese raid on Darwin, Australia, in February 1942

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USPS Identification Statement
BBC History Revealed (ISSN 2632-6930) (USPS 022-450) August 2023 is published 13 times a year (monthly, with a Christmas issue in December) by Immediate Media Company London Limited, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, Hammersmith, London, W6 7BT, UK. Distributed in the US by NPS Media Group, 2 Enterprise Drive, Suite 420, Shelton, CT 06484. Periodicals postage paid at Shelton, CT and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *BBC History Revealed*, PO Box 401, Williamsport, PA 17703, USA

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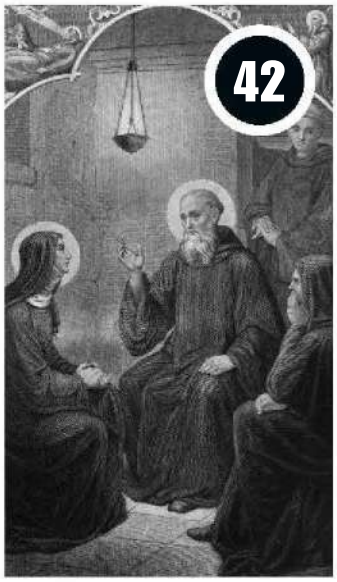
◀ From writers to scientific pioneers, discover the stories of six of the medieval period's most remarkable women



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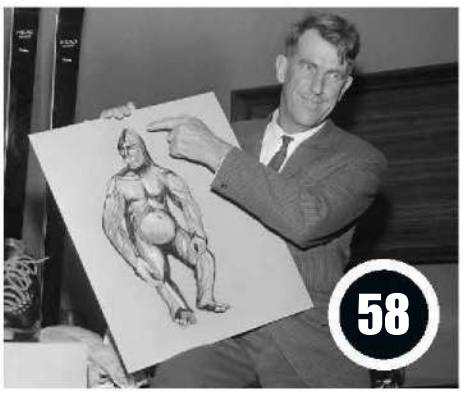

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SNAPSHOTS

1931 FLIGHT OF FANTASY

Sporting traditional dress, including masks, a group of African visitors pose for the camera after flying in an aeroplane at the Paris Colonial Exposition. Centred on the Bois de Vincennes, a park on the city's eastern outskirts, the event showcased France's colonial project as being both beneficial to France and to the countries it ruled. And it certainly wasn't a small affair: covering 110 hectares, the exposition attracted millions of visitors, who flocked to its many pavilions to learn about life in the different colonies. Sadly, the exact identities of those in this photograph – and precisely where in Africa they hailed from – has been lost to time.

GETTY IMAGES

SNAPSHOTS

c1890s
A BRIDGE TO THE PAST

With the city's New Mosque looming in the distance, a crowd of people makes its way across the Galata Bridge of Constantinople (now Istanbul) during the final decade of the 19th century. Connecting the historic Fatih district to the bustling commercial hub of Beyoğlu, the bridge shown here was actually the third of five structures to be built in the same location. Constructed by G Wells, a British company, it opened in 1875 before being moved in 1912 to replace an older bridge further along the Golden Horn. Interestingly, it is said that its predecessor was so frequently used by British soldiers during the Crimean War that they named bridge – a new card game they had developed – in its honour.

GETTY IMAGES

SNAPSHOTS

1968 FALSE DAWN

In January 1968, political reformer Alexander Dubček was elected first secretary of Czechoslovakia's Communist Party, ushering in a brief period of liberalisation dubbed the Prague Spring. But on the night of 20–21 August, Soviet-led Warsaw Pact forces invaded their wayward neighbour, prompting Dubček's eventual resignation and years of reactionary 'normalisation' by Communist hardliners. Despite the invasion – which saw Soviet tanks rolling into the streets of the Czech capital, as seen here – the Prague Spring became a symbol of resistance against Moscow's dominance.

GETTY IMAGES

THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

RECENT HISTORY HEADLINES THAT CAUGHT OUR EYE

Liz Broughton from the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History pictured with Jim Smith, who found the mastodon tooth after it vanished from the site where it was first discovered

Estimated to be under a million years old, the 30cm-long fossil is 'young' compared to similar finds

MASTODON TOOTH RESURFACES ON CALIFORNIA BEACH

The tooth of a prehistoric mastodon has been discovered by chance in California. The surprise find was made by Jennifer Schuh, who spotted the object while walking near the mouth of Aptos Creek in Santa Cruz County on 26 May. Unsure about what she had discovered, Schuh posted a photograph of the fossil on Facebook, piquing the interest of a palaeontologist who revealed its likely origins. However, upon returning to the site, Schuh discovered the tooth had vanished, prompting a media appeal. Fortunately, the fossil was located by jogger Jim Smith, who donated it to the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History. Mastodons roamed California between five million and 10,000 years ago, dying out around the end of the last Ice Age. The tooth discovered by Schuh is less than a million years old, making it a 'young' find.

GETTY IMAGES X5, SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY X2

El Galeon, which also serves as a floating museum, attracted huge crowds to Southend-on-Sea over the late spring bank holiday weekend

RESEARCHERS UNCOVER HARROWING COST OF 19TH-CENTURY CHILD LABOUR

A new study has shed light on the lives of children sent to work in northern English cotton mills during the early 19th century. The Durham University project saw scientists analyse the remains of more than 150 'pauper apprentices' buried in North Yorkshire, yielding evidence of disease and malnutrition. Born into poor families, the labourers were mostly hired in London, before being sent far from home to toil in dangerous conditions. According to the researchers, the findings resonate with modern concerns over poverty and health inequality.

REPLICA SPANISH GALLEON DELIGHTS CROWDS AT SOUTHEND PIER

Residents and visitors to Southend-on-Sea, Essex, were recently treated to the sight of a replica 17th-century Spanish galleon. *El Galeon* – which is usually found in Seville – was anchored at the city's pier between 24 May and 4 June, drawing large crowds. The 162ft-long vessel, built between 2009 and 2010, is one of only two replica galleons worldwide. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, similar ships played a vital role in trade and communication between Asia, Europe and the Americas.

CONNECTICUT PARDONS VICTIMS OF 17TH-CENTURY WITCH TRIALS

Connecticut lawmakers have voted to exonerate 12 people tried and convicted of witchcraft in the state more than 370 years ago. The resolution, which was passed with overwhelming support, was a response to nearly two decades of lobbying by the CT Witch Trial Exoneration Project, set up by descendants of the victims. As well as seeking to right historical wrongs, the group hopes their efforts will raise awareness of witch-hunts still happening in many parts of the world due to "fear, misogyny and superstition".

300

The number of years it would take – at the current rate – before equality between the sexes is reflected in London's blue plaques scheme, according to English Heritage

The body of Prince Alemayehu (*left*) was entombed in the catacombs under St George's Chapel, Windsor, at Queen Victoria's command

ETHIOPIAN PRINCE'S REMAINS DENIED RETURN BY BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Buckingham Palace has declined a request to repatriate the remains of Ethiopia's Prince Alemayehu, who was buried at Windsor Castle in the 19th century. The African royal, a purported descendant of King Solomon, was taken to England after British soldiers looted his father's citadel in 1868. Despite calls from Ethiopia to return the remains, the palace has stated that exhuming them could disturb other burials inside St George's Chapel. Efforts to secure Alemayehu's return have been ongoing since 2006, but all requests have been rebuffed.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

WE LOOK BACK AT AUGUST'S KEY ANNIVERSARIES

16 AUGUST 1819
THE MASSACRE OF PETERLOO

On St Peter's Field in Manchester, some 50,000 pro-democracy reformers gather to attend a meeting led by the radical orator Henry Hunt. But as Hunt begins to speak, the peaceful rally is suddenly and violently ambushed by mounted troops, who ride into the crowd with their sabres drawn. Within the space of just 20 minutes, nearly 700 people are injured, with a further 18 left dead or lying mortally wounded. The massacre, which is dubbed 'Peterloo' in reference to the carnage witnessed at Waterloo four years earlier, sparks widespread outrage. But rather than condemning the violence, the government instead clamps down on civil liberties. The fight for democracy, in an age where industrial towns such as Manchester have no representation in parliament, will continue for decades more.

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30 AUGUST 1918
LENIN IS SHOT

After delivering a speech at a Moscow factory, Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin is shot by a woman wielding a pistol. The wounded man is bundled into a car, where he is rushed to the Kremlin to undergo treatment. Lenin's would-be assassin, Fanny Kaplan, is revealed to be a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, a group outlawed by the Bolsheviks. But despite being virtually blind – and thus unlikely to have acted alone – Kaplan refuses to name her accomplices and is executed. Lenin survives, and the Soviet government swiftly embarks on a campaign dubbed the Red Terror, vowing to crush counterrevolution in Russia.

8 AUGUST 1942
MAHATMA GANDHI LAUNCHES THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

Shortly before midnight, Mahatma Gandhi takes to the stage in Bombay (modern-day Mumbai) to deliver perhaps the most famous speech in his country's history. In front of as many as 100,000 people, the activist calls for an end to British rule in India, which he seeks to achieve through a campaign of civil disobedience. The catalyst for the Quit India movement is Britain's decision to involve the nation in World War II, but it won't be until 1947 that independence is finally realised.

3 AUGUST 1492
COLUMBUS SETS SAIL ON A WORLD-CHANGING VOYAGE

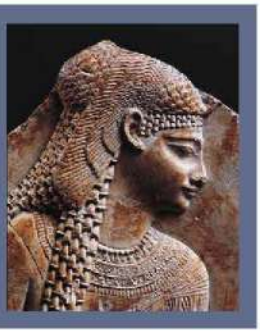
Seeking to establish a new route to Asia, Genoan navigator Christopher Columbus departs the Spanish port of Palos de la Frontera. His voyage comes with a high level of prestige: despite failing to secure the patronage of John II of Portugal, he has struck a lucrative deal with Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, enabling him to be named viceroy of any new lands he discovers. Initially, Columbus guides his three ships – the *Santa María*, *Niña* and *Pinta* – to the Canary Islands before continuing to the 'Indies'. But on 12 October, his fleet makes landfall in what will later be known as the Bahamas. Although Columbus never reaches Asia, his voyage changes the world.

17 AUGUST 1962
PETER FECHTER BLEEDS TO DEATH

Peter Fechter, an 18-year-old bricklayer, is shot by East German border guards while attempting to escape over the Berlin Wall with a friend. His companion makes it to safety, but Fechter bleeds out at the base of the wall. Despite his cries, people on the West German side – unwilling to spark an international incident by crossing onto East German soil – can only watch on in horror.

DIED: c12 AUG 30 BC
CLEOPATRA VII

The last of the pharaohs takes her own life following the death of her lover, Mark Antony. Her suicide, which ensures she avoids the humiliation of being paraded in Rome as a captive, marks the start of Egypt's integration into the Roman empire.



BORN: 15 AUG 1769
NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

In the town of Ajaccio, on the island of Corsica, the future emperor of the French emerges into the world. From these humble beginnings, his exceptional military prowess, astute political acumen and sheer bravura in adulthood will forever alter the course of European history.

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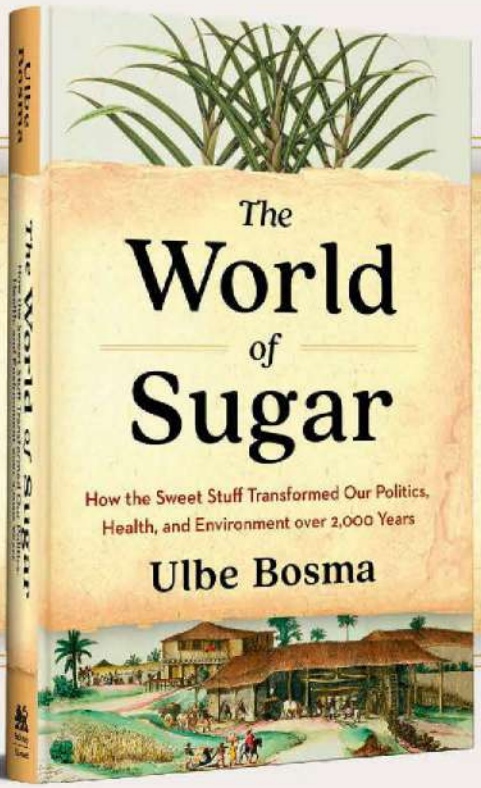

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LIFE HACKS FROM HISTORY

JUSTIN POLLARD SHARES THE PAST'S BEST (AND WORST) SELF-HELP ADVICE

LIFE HACK #03

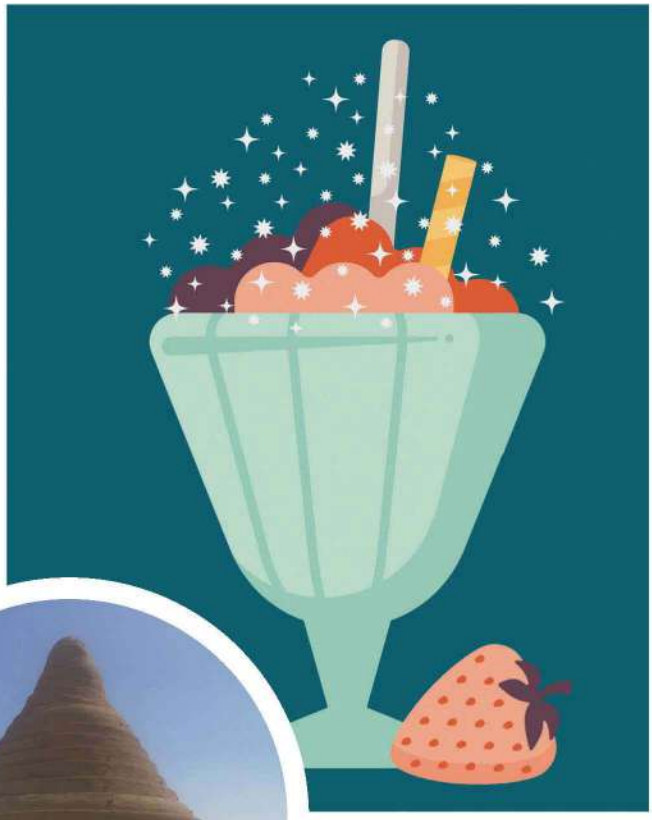
Staying cool

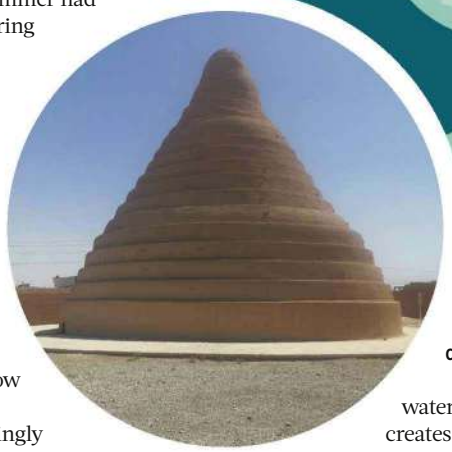
As you mop the sweat from your brow on a long hot summer's day, you'll likely want to grab an ice cream or go for a dip in a pool. But what did our forebears do? **Justin Pollard** has the answers...

Having spent most of the year wondering how we can afford to stay warm, the brief dog days of summer give us an opportunity to complain that it's now too hot. So what can history teach us about cooling down?

The easiest thing to do when overheating is suck on a piece of ice, which was something very much on the mind of King Zimri-Lim of Mari, in what is now Syria. His beautifully preserved Cuneiform library tells us that he built an ice house around 1780 BC. He boldly claimed it was the first ever – and perhaps it was – but the record goes silent after his (probably fatal) encounter with the Amorite king Hammurabi.

Digging insulated pits to keep snow and ice in during summer had also taken off in China during the country's Spring and Autumn period (770–481 BC), while by 400 BC, the Persians were building impressive *yakhchāls* – huge evaporation coolers that could store ice in the desert.





The Persians may not have had freezers, but they did have colossal *yakhchāls* – such as the example shown left – where they could store ice and other goods

SWEET TREATS

But having brought ice to the desert, what are we going to do with it? How about make a dessert?

Ice cream has a surprisingly long history of cooling the tempers of at least the wealthy. Alexander the Great, for instance, liked snow flavoured with honey and fruit, and built his own snow pits to keep fresh mountain snow for his expeditions, so there was always a lolly on hand at the end of a hard day conquering the known world. This unappealing-sounding treat was not ice cream, of course. That required a different trick, as milk freezes below the freezing temperature of water – packing milk in ice just creates a chilly milkshake.

In fact, it was the Neapolitan scholar Giambattista della Porta who, in 1558, wrote how adding saltpetre to ice lowered its freezing point below zero. Being something of a *bon viveur*, he didn't use this idea to make ice cream, however, but to make wine lollipops. The first English recipe for ice cream didn't appear until 1718, courtesy of *Mrs Mary Eales's Receipts*.

But what if we want more than a cooling cone? There is also the long history of air conditioning we could turn to. Ancient civilisations from the Egyptians onwards had architectural methods for passive air conditioning, from funnelling precious breezes, to using water courses and shade to keep things cool.

Of course, if you are the master of the known world you don't need technology – you have brute force – so Nero cooled his swimming pool by simply having slaves lug ice down from the mountains and throw it in.

In 1620, Cornelis Drebbel, inventor of the first operational submarine, demonstrated to his master King James VI and I a system of evaporative troughs with which he "turned summer into winter" in Westminster Hall – a chilly building that frankly rarely needed cooling down.

A BLUNT RESPONSE

Later, in the mid-18th century, the American founding father and polymath Benjamin Franklin took evaporative cooling even further, using volatile liquids to plunge temperatures down as far as –14°C. Charmingly, he concluded, "From this experiment one may see the possibility of freezing a man to death on a warm summer's day."

But ultimate coolness must come from within, and *sang* doesn't get much more *froid* than in the veins of the British soldier and statesman Lord Uxbridge. Having had his leg mangled at the battle of Waterloo, the offending limb was removed by a surgeon without anaesthetic. His only comment was a very cool, "The knives seem rather blunt".

JUSTIN POLLARD is an acclaimed historian and writer. As a historical consultant he has worked on more than 50 film and TV projects, from *Elizabeth* and *Mulan* to the BBC quiz show *QI*

GETTY IMAGES X3

The Trojan War

The ancient clash between the Greeks and Trojans has captivated people for millennia. **Danny Bird** looks at its influence on the Romans, what archaeologists have found, and whether it was all just a myth

IS THE TROJAN WAR A MYTH OR A REAL HISTORICAL EVENT?

Epic poem the *Iliad* is the most famed source for there ever having been a conflict between the ancient Greeks and Trojans. However, the historicity of the events depicted in this work – as well as those referenced in its sister epic, the *Odyssey* – are less certain, as is the identity of their author, Homer. The poems have been dated to the late eighth or early seventh centuries BC, during a time when writing was becoming widespread in Mycenaean civilisation (the Late Bronze Age Greeks), but the narratives allude to earlier incidents, suggesting there was an oral tradition behind the 'events' that would have been familiar to an ancient audience.

It follows that dating the Trojan War is problematic, although scholars tend to agree that Homer was writing about a heroic age that existed some four centuries before the *Iliad*'s conception. As a result, the texts are replete with anachronisms, such as references to the construction of temples – buildings that did not arise within the Greek world until the eighth century BC. But what is indisputable is that peoples during the classical era, and right through to the late medieval age, believed the Trojan War to have been an actual historical event.

WHAT CAUSED THE TROJAN WAR?

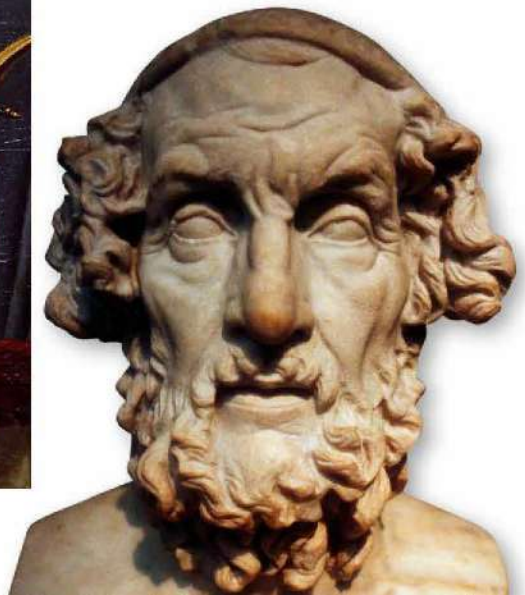
The *Iliad* itself focuses on the conflict's final year. But the war's origins are said to lie a decade earlier on the Greek mainland when Helen, consort of King Menelaus of Sparta, eloped with the Trojan prince Paris after the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. Whether she was abducted or chose to abscond to Troy of her own volition is moot. According to myth, the goddess of discord, Eris, was not invited to the nuptials. Outraged, she threw a golden apple inscribed with "to the most beautiful" into the midst of the wedding feast.

Three deities, Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, entrusted Paris to judge which of them was most deserving of the fruit. Aphrodite, goddess of love, won the contest when she promised him the most beautiful mortal woman in the world: Helen. This divinely inspired mischief enraged Menelaus, who resolved to retrieve Sparta's queen. Alongside his powerful brother, Agamemnon, and dozens of other Greek rulers, Menelaus sailed to Troy with a fleet of 1,186 ships.

WHERE WAS TROY?

Since antiquity, Troy's location has been synonymous with an area around what is today northwest Turkey, a region once known as Troad. Overlooking the Dardanelles Strait, it lured several Homer devotees in the 19th century. In 1822, a Scottish journalist and geologist, Charles Maclaren, was the first person to suggest that a mound of earth called Hisarlik contained the ruins of Troy. Decades later, Englishman Frank Calvert, a consular official living in the Ottoman empire, began excavating the site.

BELOW LEFT: **The conflict was sparked by an illicit love affair between Spartan queen Helen and Trojan prince Paris**



BELOW RIGHT: **This bust of the *Iliad*'s elusive poet, Homer, is a Roman copy of a Greek original**

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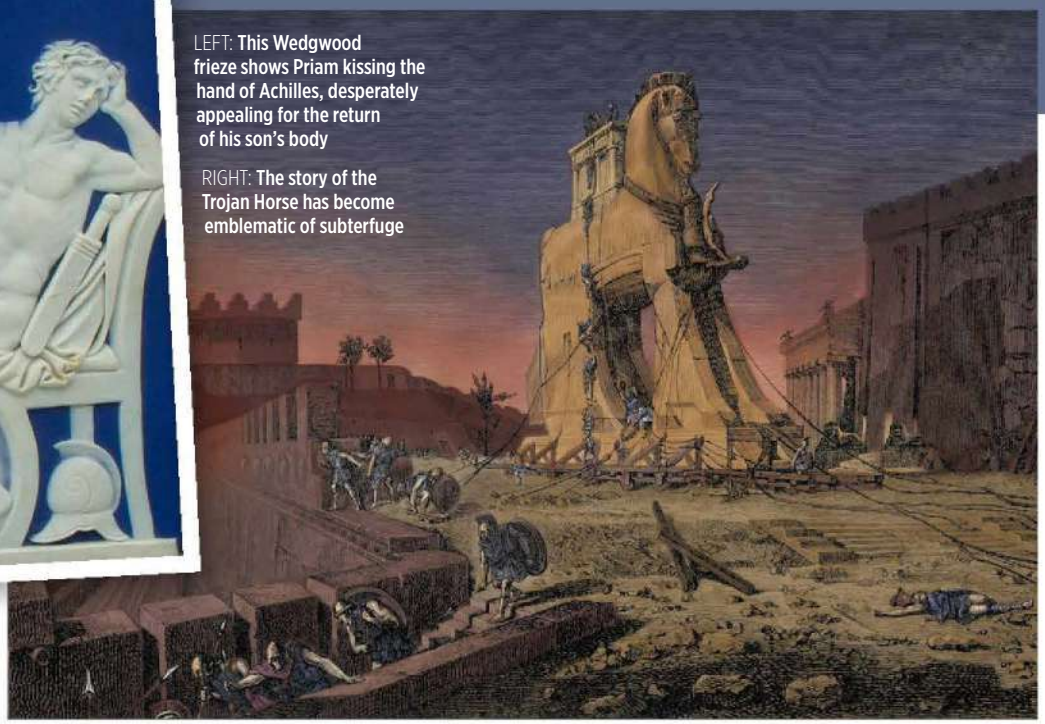

LEFT: **This Wedgwood frieze shows Priam kissing the hand of Achilles, desperately appealing for the return of his son's body**

RIGHT: **The story of the Trojan Horse has become emblematic of subterfuge**

However, Hisarlik only yielded its secrets upon the arrival in 1870 of the Prussian businessman Heinrich Schliemann. Determined to prove the veracity of the *Iliad*, Schliemann dug deep trenches into the mound. He uncovered evidence of a well-fortified city and found evidence of construction dating back as far as 3000 BC. When Schliemann unearthed precious metals, he was convinced he had found Helen's jewels. Subsequent digs have revealed nine distinct layers in all but no evidence of a major siege between levels VI and VIIa, the stratum pertaining to the Late Bronze Age.

Once a prosperous seaport, Troy had been part of the Hittite empire's western frontier. In fact, Hittite tablets engraved in cuneiform record the settlement as 'Wilusa', which is related to the Greek 'Ilion', Homer's other name for Troy. Most tantalising of all – and mindful of difficulties in establishing the war's timeline – these tablets refer to a struggle for the city against a people called 'Ahhiyawa' during the rule of 'Alaksandu'. Scholars equate these invaders with Homer's 'Achaeans' (Mycenaean Greeks), while Alaksandu (Alexander) is a name associated with Paris.

WHAT WAS ACHILLES' ROLE IN THE TROJAN WAR?

The *Iliad*'s opening sentence is an appeal to the muse of epic poetry, Calliope, to sing of the "anger of Achilles". His frustration with the overall Greek commander, Agamemnon, is a major plot point. Moreover, Achilles' duel with the Trojan crown prince, Hector, is the story's defining moment. Following Hector's demise, Achilles defiles his corpse, grievously offending both Greek and Trojan funerary rites.

The gods intervene to preserve Hector's body and the king of Troy, Priam, eventually sneaks into the Greek camp to appeal to his son's killer for the return of the body. Achilles is later slain when Paris fires an arrow through his vulnerable heel – the result of his sea nymph mother, Thetis, dipping him into the River Styx by his foot as an infant in a bid to make him immortal.

> "Once a prosperous seaport, Troy had been part of the Hittite empire's western frontier"

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WHAT IMPACT HAS THE TROJAN WAR HAD ON THE WESTERN IMAGINATION?

The Trojan Horse is perhaps the story's most enduring symbol. Nevertheless, the *Iliad* contains no reference to it, while the *Odyssey* mentions it only briefly. The tale of how Odysseus masterminded the means of breaching Troy's formidable walls via subterfuge was elaborated by the Roman poet Virgil. With the Greek fleet seemingly retreating after a decade-long siege, Odysseus and his compatriots alighted from the horse, opened the city gates and enabled the Greeks to gain entry to sack Troy. To this day, wariness of Greeks bearing gifts, and computer viruses, owe their origins to this moment.

Troy's downfall was central to Roman identity. Virgil's *Aeneid* – written between 29 BC and 19 BC – looks at the aftermath, charting the journey of the Trojan hero Aeneas across the Mediterranean to Italy. The war refugee was the ancestor of Rome's twin founders, Romulus and Remus, and thus of Roman civilisation itself. Despite the enigma surrounding its poet and the lack of archaeology to corroborate the story of a Trojan War, the *Iliad* remains the cornerstone of the western literary canon.

GET HOOKED

LISTEN
Professor Paul Cartledge answers listeners' questions and popular internet search queries about Troy on the *HistoryExtra* podcast: *historyextra.com/troy-qa*

William Blake: Romantic visionary

Seeing the world in a way that made his contemporaries think him mad, Blake was a minor figure in his own time. Today, as **Danny Bird** reveals, he's regarded as one of Britain's greatest-ever artists and poets

When William Blake was just four years old, he saw God appear in a window. A few years later, he came across a tree teeming with angels on Peckham Rye. Visions such as these were an everyday occurrence for Blake, a man whose work blurred the barrier between lived reality and the spiritual plane. Largely overlooked during his lifetime and even dismissed as insane, Blake has latterly come to be seen as one of the foremost figures of the Romantic Age. It's a reputation that rests both on the extraordinary imagery of his art and on his resonant poetry.

Born on 28 November 1757 in a room above his father's hosiery shop in Soho, London, Blake's parents, James and Catherine, were religious dissenters (Protestants opposed to the Church of England). He grew up in modest circumstances, receiving a rudimentary education at his mother's knee – commonplace at the time and something the older Blake regarded as crucial to developing an unfettered imagination. In 1772, he was apprenticed to the engraver James Basire and learned his craft by sketching the monuments inside Westminster Abbey.

INSPIRATION FROM ABOVE

Blake became an independent engraver and a student at the Royal Academy in 1779. But his experience there only served to fuel his opposition to the mainstream art establishment. In 1782, he married Catherine Boucher. Their union was a long and blissful one. He taught her to read, to write after a fashion and to paint. She even shared in his visions and later claimed that he visited her every day after his death.

The early 1780s saw Blake establish himself as a printer in partnership with a fellow former Basire apprentice, James Parker. However, tragedy struck in 1787 when Blake's beloved younger brother, Robert, died of tuberculosis. Keeping vigil at his bedside, the visionary artist claimed to witness Robert's spirit ascend to the ceiling, "clapping its hands for joy".

Thomas Phillips captured Blake's "poetic expression" in this 1807 portrait by asking him to talk about the angel Gabriel

This moment was so profound that Blake credited his brother's spiritual influence as the source of the 'Illuminated Printing' technique that would become his trademark. Claiming to have had the knowledge revealed to him via Robert's spirit, Blake set out on his most productive phase as an artist. Painting his designs on copper using an acid-resistant liquid before the plate was etched and printed, this method enabled him to become his own printer, binder, advertiser and salesman.

In 1789, he published the first of arguably his most famous anthologies, *Songs of Innocence*. Five years later, he paired it with *Songs of Experience*, thus "Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul". Blake ignored the vogue for landscapes and portraiture. Instead, his own visions began to consume him as an artist. Biblical mythology and British history were also key sources of inspiration. His talents attracted patrons and Blake would ultimately create hundreds of paintings, illuminating everything from Shakespeare's plays to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

A deeply conscientious individual, political and social satire recurred in his work. Like many of his Romantic contemporaries, Blake supported the French Revolution, even donning a Phrygian cap, an ancient symbol of liberty, in solidarity. In 1800, the Blakes were living outside of London in the Sussex village of Felpham, supported by the gentleman poet William Hayley. As tensions with Napoleon's France escalated, British troops were deployed to the south coast. One day in August 1803, Blake ejected a soldier from his cottage garden and was accused of having "damned the king of England". Faced with a trial for sedition, the Blakes relocated to London, only for a court to acquit him the following year.

OBSCURITY AND RECOGNITION

Blake's retrospective exhibition of 16 temperas and watercolours in 1809–10 aimed to reach a wider audience. The highlight was *The Ancient Britons*, a 14ft-wide painting depicting King Arthur's last battle. Sadly, the work has since been lost. Attendance was sparse and the exhibition itself gained notoriety through a scathing review by Robert Hunt, published in *The Examiner*. Hunt called the pictures "wretched" and Blake "an unfortunate lunatic". As his notebooks and, in some readings, his poems reveal, Blake was devastated. He began to withdraw from public view, engraving fewer plates and sinking deeper into poverty.

By 1821, the Blakes were living in a two-room apartment on the Strand. His final patron, John Linnell, provided them with some comfort and Blake entertained a coterie of enthusiasts known as 'the Ancients'. He died on 12 August 1827 and was buried in the nonconformist graveyard at Bunhill Fields. During the latter half of the 19th century, Blake's contributions to literature and art were finally recognised. In 1916, Sir Hubert Parry put music to the preface of Blake's epic poem *Milton* and, with later help from Sir Edward Elgar's orchestration, *Jerusalem* became England's unofficial anthem. Blake's place in the national story was assured.

GETTY IMAGES X4

Satan Arousing the Rebel Angels – one of a series of watercolours Blake painted depicting scenes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*

"A deeply conscientious individual, political and social satire recurred in Blake's work"

RIGHT: **Blake's burial place in the nonconformists' graveyard at Bunhill Fields in central London**

FAR RIGHT: **This etching of 'The Tyger' – one of the most famous poems from *Songs of Experience* – was hand-painted by Blake himself**

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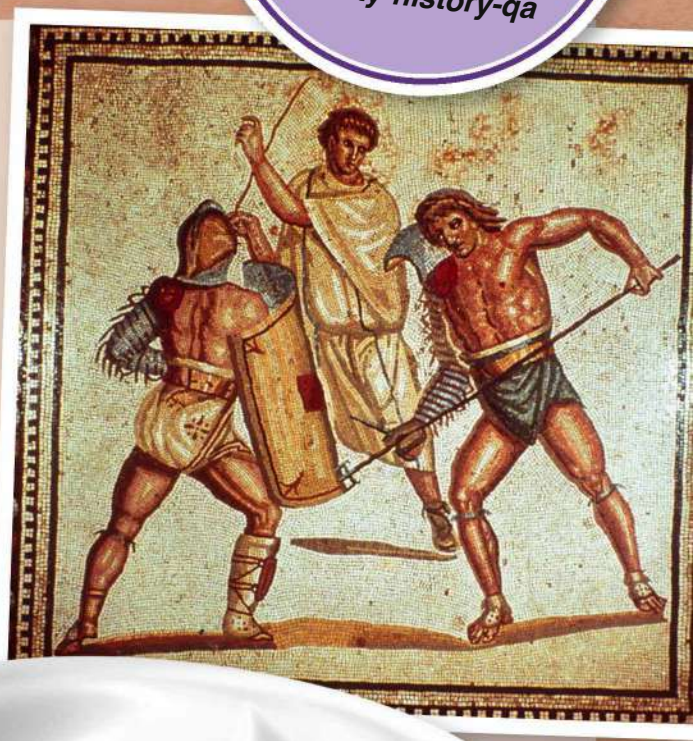
5 THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE HISTORY OF BEAUTY

Lucy Jane Santos examines a selection of the cosmetic practices our forebears used in a bid to keep themselves looking their best

PODCAST

To hear Lucy Jane Santos discuss bygone beauty treatments on the HistoryExtra podcast, visit *historyextra.com/beauty-history-qa*

1 COLD CREAM IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST COSMETICS



Roman gladiators, such as the spear and shield-wielding men on this mosaic, are said to have used cold cream to treat their wounds

For centuries, people have relied on the benefits of cold cream to nourish and beautify their skin. The unique cosmetic, crafted from a combination of natural ingredients like olive oil, beeswax, rose petals and water, creates a soothing and refreshing sensation when applied, thanks to the evaporation of water on the skin.

The roots of cold cream can be traced back to the ancient times, specifically the second century AD, where it is believed to have originated under the guidance of the Roman Greek physician Galen. Initially formulated as a healing ointment for treating wounds, some believe that it might have been used by gladiators as they recovered from their gruelling battles.

As time progressed, the popularity of the product endured, earning its place in numerous recipe books and household manuals. In the 19th century, cold cream took a significant step forward by entering the realm of mass production. Companies like Boots the Chemist recognised its demand and began offering the coveted beauty product to the masses. Today, cold cream continues to hold its position as a widely accessible and popular skincare item.

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A 1920s magazine advert extolling the virtues of Pond's Cold Cream. The product is still sold by chemists and supermarkets today

GETTY IMAGES X8, ALAMY X1

The feet of an elderly woman from Liuyi, in China's Yunnan province. The village is known as the 'Bound Feet Women Village' owing to the high number of women there who were subjected to the practice in the early 20th century

2 TINY FEET WERE THE PINNACLE OF BEAUTY IN 10TH-CENTURY CHINA

The practice of foot binding, which aimed to achieve the coveted ideal of delicate and petite 'lotus feet', originated in 10th-century China. This intricate process involved the breaking and binding of the toes (excluding the big toe) against the sole of the foot using strips of fabric, resulting in a painfully deformed shape. It could take three or four years for the foot to grow in this severely altered manner.

Initially confined to the imperial court, foot binding emerged from the legend of a court dancer whose feet resembled the crescent shape of the new Moon, captivating the admiration of the emperor. Gradually, the practice spread to the wealthy elite and eventually became widespread throughout China: an estimated 2 billion Chinese women, primarily from the upper classes, underwent the foot binding process.

While the prevailing belief suggests that foot binding aimed to please men, who considered small feet alluring, alternative theories exist regarding its cultural and economic significance. Some argue that it symbolised social status: women with bound feet were viewed as affluent, signifying that they were exempt from manual labour. Moreover, foot binding severely restricted women's mobility, rendering them more reliant on male household members and potentially ensuring a compliant workforce of young girls engaged in sedentary activities like weaving.

The practice of foot binding started to decline in the early 20th century, and the last factory producing lotus shoes closed in the late 1990s.

Chinese girls display their 'lotus feet', c1901. It has been argued that having bound feet was an indicator of high social status, and implied that the woman was exempt from manual labour

3 ANCIENT EGYPTIAN COSMETICS WERE USED BY BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

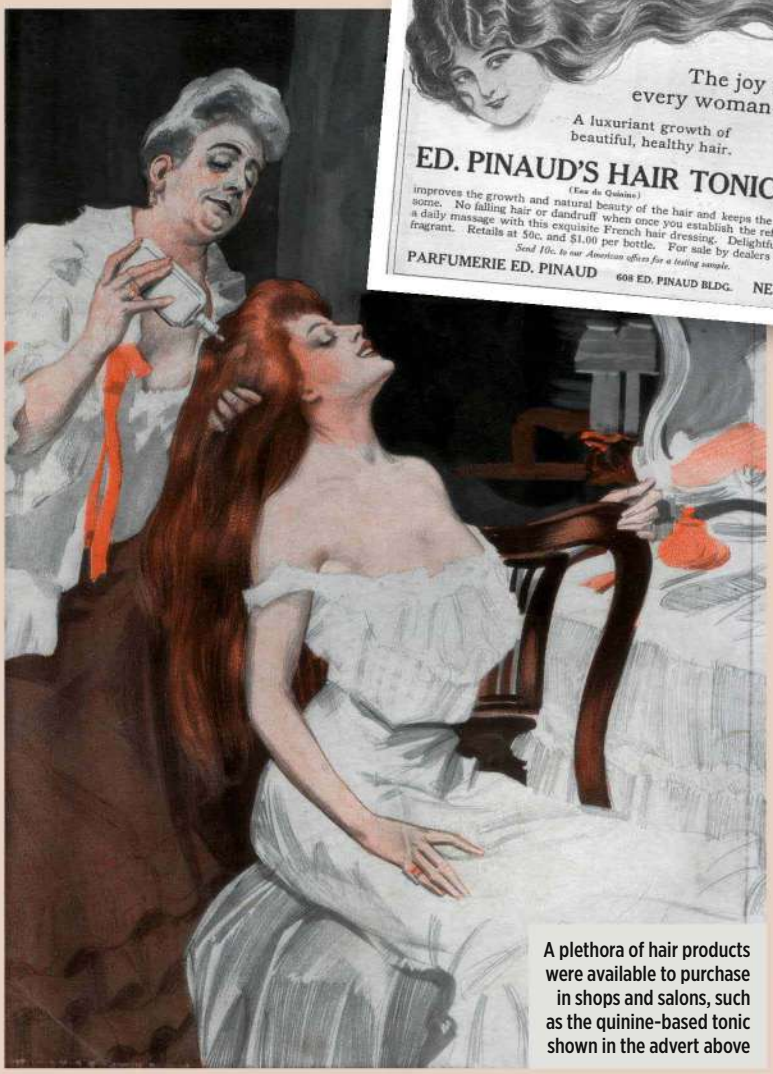
Cosmetics in ancient Egypt have left a trail of compelling evidence, and archaeologists continue to unearth a rich array of cosmetic items within tomb offerings. Among the fascinating discoveries are an assortment of objects such as mirrors, hairpins, combs, containers, applicators and – notably – eye makeup, including kohl and eyeliner.

However, the significance of cosmetics in ancient Egypt surpassed mere vanity and personal adornment. These cosmetic treasures served a multitude of purposes, extending into the realm of health benefits. The ancient Egyptians harnessed cosmetics for their ability to soften the skin, shield against sunburn, and protect the delicate eyes from the punishing effects of the sun and sand. The application of kohl as eyeliner, in particular, carried both practical and symbolic weight. Not only did it shield the eyes, but it also possessed ritualistic qualities, though the precise motivations behind its use remain shrouded in mystery.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of ancient Egyptian cosmetics lies in their universality. They were not confined to a specific gender or social class; rather, men and women from diverse strata of society embraced these cosmetic practices. Such popularity is substantiated by artistic depictions and the unearthing of cosmetic artefacts crafted from various materials such as marble, wood and alabaster. These remarkable findings underscore the availability and utilisation of cosmetic products that catered to both affordability and luxury, painting a vivid picture of the ancient Egyptian fascination with self-care and beautification. ▶

RIGHT: **The death mask of a male mummy depicts the deceased wearing kohl eyeliner**

BELOW: **An ancient Egyptian cosmetics palette, along with a stick used for kohl application**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A plethora of hair products were available to purchase in shops and salons, such as the quinine-based tonic shown in the advert above

4 APPLYING VICTORIAN HAIR TONICS COULD HAVE EXPLOSIVE CONSEQUENCES

When we think of hazardous Victorian cosmetics, products laced with ingredients such as mercury and arsenic probably spring to mind. But those weren't the only dangerous substances that women handled in a bid keep themselves looking their best.

Victorian hair tonics, such as 'Madame Fox's Life for the Hair', combined extracts of bay leaves with petroleum to create a dry shampoo-like substance. These products aimed to cleanse the hair by removing dust and oils, and they were used both at home and in salons. However, newspapers of the time reported numerous disastrous consequences resulting from their use.

One tragic incident occurred in 1897, when a woman named Fanny Samuelson lost her life during a petrol treatment at Monsieur Emile and Co's upmarket salon in London. After staff applied the tonic, the friction caused by rubbing her hair with a towel ignited the unstable petrol in the product, resulting in combustion. Meanwhile, another notable incident occurred when an actress accidentally set fire to her hair and clothes after a few drops of petrol lotion fell onto a nearby stove.

The immediate dangers posed by petroleum-based hair tonics were significant – not only for the women using them but also for the hairdressers and other individuals involved in the application process. It wouldn't be until much later, when most salons gained hot and cold running water, that such dangerous products fell out of use.

5 RENAISSANCE WOMEN USUALLY OPTED FOR A HAIRLESS LOOK

During the Renaissance period, beauty standards took an unusual turn, leading to practices and trends that may seem rather peculiar to us today. While the removal of body hair is a common practice in the 21st century, the women of Renaissance Europe took this one step further by plucking their hairlines too, thus making their foreheads appear significantly larger. Indeed, a highly curved and prominent forehead was considered a desirable trait in a woman – something that can be seen in numerous portraits and other artistic depictions from the period.

As for the rest of their visage, Renaissance women also spent an ample amount of time taming their eyelashes and eyebrows, the latter of which were supposed to be thin and delicate, rather than thick and bushy. The world's most famous image of a Renaissance woman – the *Mona Lisa* – shows its sitter as having no eyebrows at all. However, rather than a fashion choice or a quirk of Leonardo da Vinci's artistic style, historians have speculated that the subject's eyebrows actually faded from the painting over time due to overzealous cleaning efforts.

A portrait of Isotta degli Atti, the wife of a 15th-century nobleman, shows her sporting the typically high hairline of the period

GET HOOKED

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These facts were derived from an episode of the *HistoryExtra* podcast with Lucy Jane Santos, an expert in the history of 20th-century leisure, health and beauty, and the author of *Half Lives: The Unlikely History of Radium* (Icon Books, 2020). To stream the full episode, visit *historyextra.com/beauty-qa*

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X1

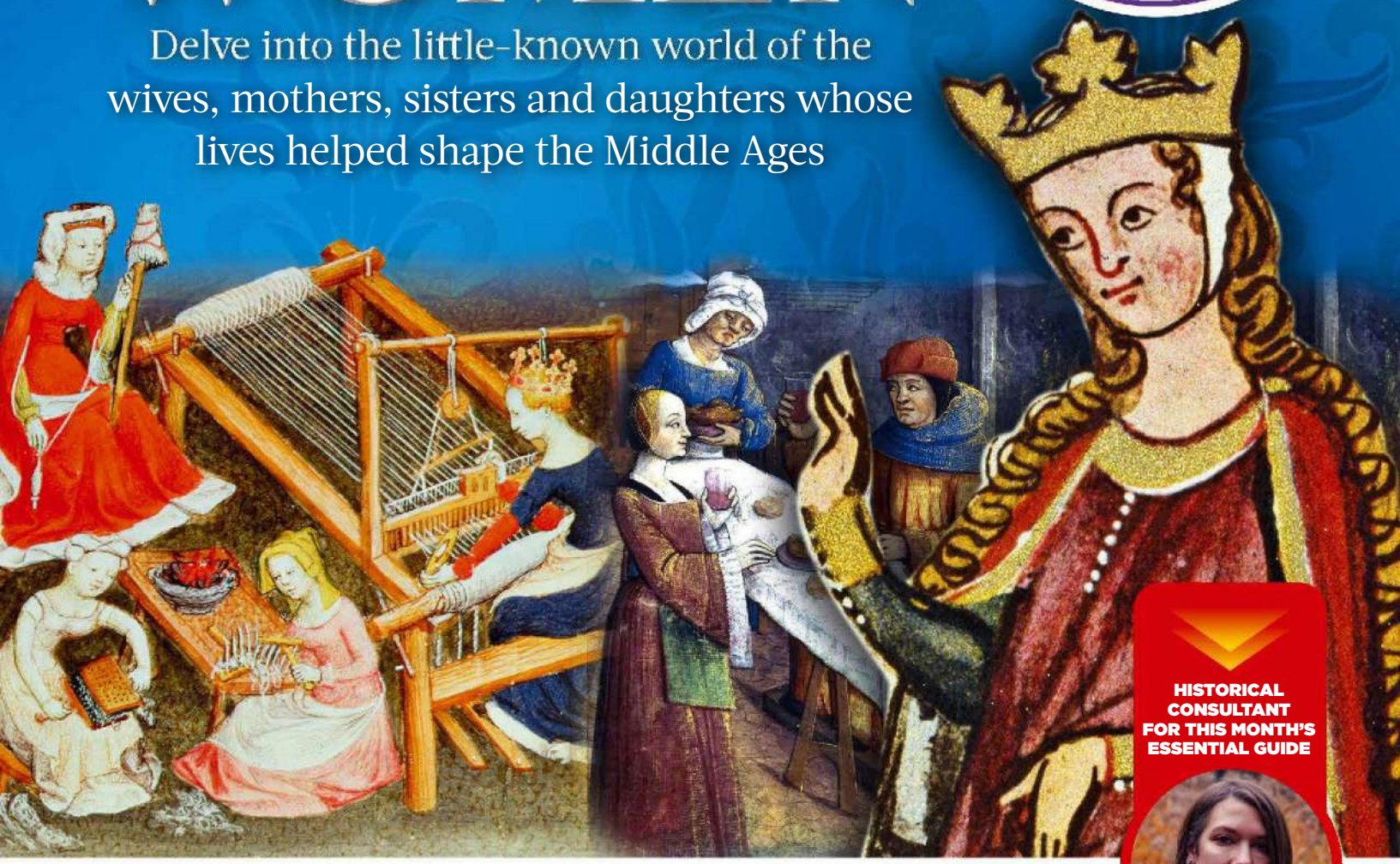
YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

MEDIEVAL WOMEN

Delve into the little-known world of the wives, mothers, sisters and daughters whose lives helped shape the Middle Ages

PODCAST

Dr Eleanor Janega answers questions about medieval women on the *HistoryExtra* podcast: *historyextra.com/medieval-women-qa*



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Dr Eleanor Janega answers key questions about the lives of women during the Middle Ages

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Discover how medieval women juggled motherhood and other responsibilities in a rapidly changing world

35 6 trailblazing medieval women
A look at the period's most important female figures: from a celebrated playwright to an audacious scientist

40 Matriarchs and mystics
Meet the fearless queens and 'influencers' who wielded power within a deeply patriarchal social order

42 Pious pioneers
Learn about the important role that women played in the development of the medieval church

45 Making an honest living
We explore the surprising array of jobs that occupied medieval women: from doing the laundry to running their own businesses

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Dr Eleanor Janega argues that a tendency to focus on 'Great Men' has long sidelined women from history

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HISTORICAL CONSULTANT FOR THIS MONTH'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE

DR ELEANOR JANEGA

is a historian specialising in sexuality, propaganda, the urban experience and apocalyptic thought in the late medieval period. Her books include *The Once and Future Sex: Going Medieval on Women's Roles in Society* (WW Norton & Co, 2023).

GETT IMAGES X2, ALAMY X1, AKG X1

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MEDIEVAL WOMEN

Dr Eleanor Janega addresses common misconceptions surrounding the lives of women during the Middle Ages

Q: How equal were medieval men and women in the workplace?

A: Medieval men and women had different roles and responsibilities, but when it came to daily work, there were instances of equality between them. In the peasant class, for example, women were not only doing the same tasks as men but also taking on additional responsibilities. In the context of middle-class, artisanal occupations, women played a significant role as well. If a person belonged to a guild, such as a glover, their wife would typically be involved in the same work, making gloves alongside her husband. Additionally, women were expected to handle bookkeeping and financial matters, which were considered feminine tasks at the time.

However, it's important to note that women were not always accorded the same level of respect and recognition as men, especially within guilds, which, in many cases, women were expressly forbidden from joining. If a woman's husband was a guild member and she assisted him in his craft, she could be brought into the guild after his death. But if she remarried, she would lose that guild membership, unless her new husband was also a guild member. This limited women's opportunities for advancement and representation.

There were some guilds that allowed women to become members, such as the guild that existed in Paris for bathhouse-keepers, but even then, women still faced limitations in terms of climbing the ranks. They were excluded from the top-level decision-making committee, highlighting a gender disparity within these organisations. On the other hand, some professions, like silk-making, were dominated

ABOVE: **A 14th-century French image shows a trio of women gathering to bake bread in a communal oven**

LEFT: **Spinning was another chore undertaken by women – made easier thanks to the introduction of the spinning wheel by the 13th century**

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X1

by women, and men were not allowed to be involved at all. In these cases, women enjoyed high levels of respect and expertise in their fields.

Unfortunately, when it comes to studying the history of medieval women in the workforce, it can be challenging to find specific information about individual women. The practice of coverture, where women's identities were subsumed by their husbands' names upon marriage, has obscured the historical record. This lack of visibility hinders our understanding of women's contributions and their individual achievements and reflects a societal focus on marital status and the importance placed on whom a woman was married to, rather than her own identity and accomplishments.

So, overall, while there were instances of equality and women's active participation in daily work during medieval times, there were also significant limitations and disparities that hindered their recognition and advancement in certain occupations and guilds.

Q: What are some common misconceptions about medieval women?

A: One prevalent misconception I frequently encounter is the belief that women in the Middle Ages were constantly accused of witchcraft. In reality, associating women with witchcraft was an early modern phenomenon, not a medieval one. While there were concerns about women engaging in love magic or chanting while weaving, these were more like minor transgressions. Women would be reprimanded for such actions, but they weren't accused of worshipping the Devil or subjected to large-scale witch hunts like those seen in later periods.

Another misconception is the assumption that women were universally worse off in the past compared to the present. Certain aspects of medieval society were comparatively less repressive, including attitudes towards abortion. During the medieval period, the church was primarily concerned with preventing infanticide rather than focusing heavily on punishing women who sought abortions, and thus adopted a more lenient stance for the first trimester. This approach was less stringent than the stricter policies that emerged in the modern period. It was only in the later years when various forms of Christianity arose that a spiritual competition between Protestants and Catholics led to debates over the church's stance on abortion.

"WOMEN WERE CONSIDERED TO BE COLD AND WET – IN CONTRAST TO MEN, WHO WERE HOT AND DRY"

Q: What do we know about the lives of black women in medieval Europe?

A: Black women were present across medieval Europe, predominantly in places with strong trade connections, such as the Mediterranean littoral. In fact, Afro-Eurasia was surprisingly well-connected during the Middle Ages, with people moving between Europe and parts of Africa like Morocco, Egypt and Ethiopia. Medieval Europeans were fascinated by Ethiopia in particular, partly because they knew they were Christian. But while we have evidence of black women's presence in medieval Europe – in the form of skeletal remains and grave goods – unfortunately there is little in the way of written documentation about their actual, lived experiences.

Q: How were women viewed medically during the medieval period?

A: Medical understanding of women was broadly based on the same concepts as in ancient times, although there were some advancements in medical knowledge during the Middle Ages. The prevailing theory was that the body, including women's bodies, was composed of four humours – blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile – which needed to be in balance for a person to be healthy.

TOP: **The theory of the four humours was still prevalent in the Middle Ages – and used to draw conclusions about women's bodies**

ABOVE: **A 15th-century depiction of a black woman. While women of colour did live in medieval Europe, we know very little about their experiences**

Within this framework, women were considered to be cold and wet, in contrast to men, who were seen as hot and dry – something that was consistent with ancient medical beliefs. The renowned Roman Greek physician Galen, for example, described women as being inside-out versions of men, pointing to the difference in genitalia as supposed evidence of this distinction. Men had external genitals, while women's ▶

ABOVE: **A 13th-century image of a cadaver being dissected. Such examinations were used to study women's reproductive organs, which were deemed 'mysterious' due to their internal nature**

genitals were internal; testicles were likened to ovaries, and so on.

Physicians of the time were often frustrated in their understanding of women's bodies because of their internal nature, and medical works about women were sometimes titled *The Secrets of Women* due to the difficulty in observing their anatomy directly. Dissections, which were banned in the ancient world for fear of releasing bad humours, were occasionally permitted during the medieval period. These provided some insights into the appearance of the ovaries and the womb, but treating conditions related to these organs was challenging when they couldn't be directly observed.

Humoural theory linked the ageing process with becoming colder and wetter, and menstruation was considered a result of the body being unable to burn off excess blood. In fact, menstrual blood was seen as a build-up of male humours and deemed potentially poisonous. There were even concerns that old women – who had gone through the menopause – could harm infants with their 'poisonous glances' because they couldn't expel their menses anymore.

Q: How were unmarried women viewed by medieval society?

A: Unmarried women were viewed with a mix of acceptance and suspicion. Women with wealth, such as those who inherited land or had a trade, were more likely to remain unmarried, but there was still concern about independent single women and what they might do. In some places, like Southampton in England, there was even a requirement for unmarried women to become part of a household within a week of arriving in the city; they couldn't simply set up a shop or live independently. So there was a worry about the actions and intentions of single women and a desire to keep them under control and ensure they didn't cause any trouble.

From the perspective of the church, the ideal situation for women was to never marry and instead join the religious life as nuns, and the church constantly promoted the idea of women choosing a life of celibacy and dedication to God. There were even written works, like *A Letter on Virginity*, which specifically addressed young women, discouraging them from getting married. Such works highlighted the difficulties of motherhood, the risks of childbirth, and the potential challenges of married life, suggesting that joining the church was a better option.

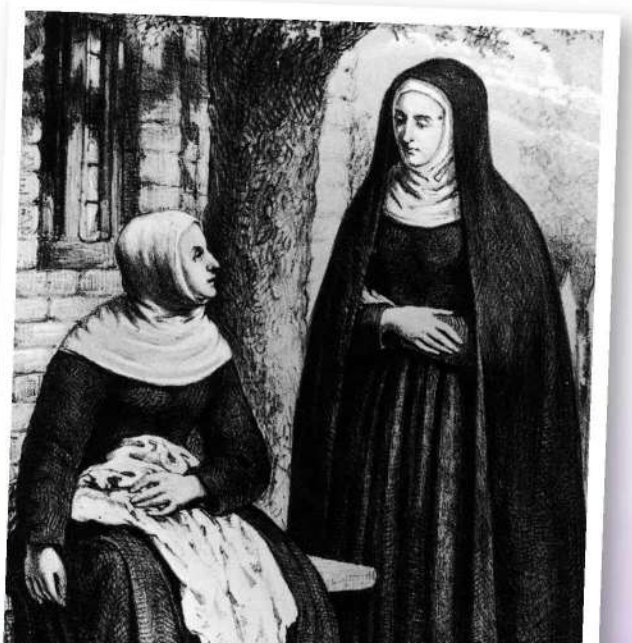
There was also concern about groups of single women coming together. When unmarried women formed alliances or started businesses together, it raised suspicion and uncertainty among society. An example from 14th-century Prague involved women running a herb shop, living together but not with their husbands. They were reported to the archdeacon, who, although he couldn't pinpoint the exact issue with their situation, still considered them suspect. People just didn't know what to make of single women living in groups and questioned their motives and activities.

Overall, women were seen as unruly, highly sexual, and prone to inappropriate behaviour. The prevailing belief was that women needed the control and guidance of men to keep them out of trouble. While it was possible to navigate unmarried life, it was often easier for widows to assert their independence than for single women who had never been married.

Q: What was childbirth like in the Middle Ages?

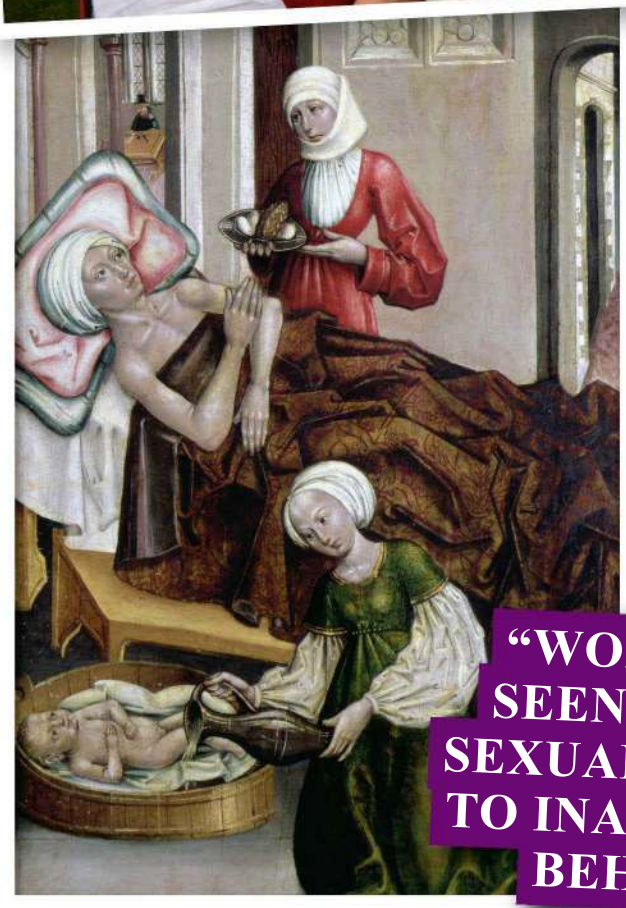
A: It was expected that women would become wives and mothers, so there is actually quite a lot of information available about medieval childbirth. Midwives, rather than physicians, typically attended to expectant mothers, but the process was incredibly dangerous. Even in the present day, childbirth can be risky – but imagine how much more perilous it was in the Middle Ages without access to blood transfusions or advanced pain relief.

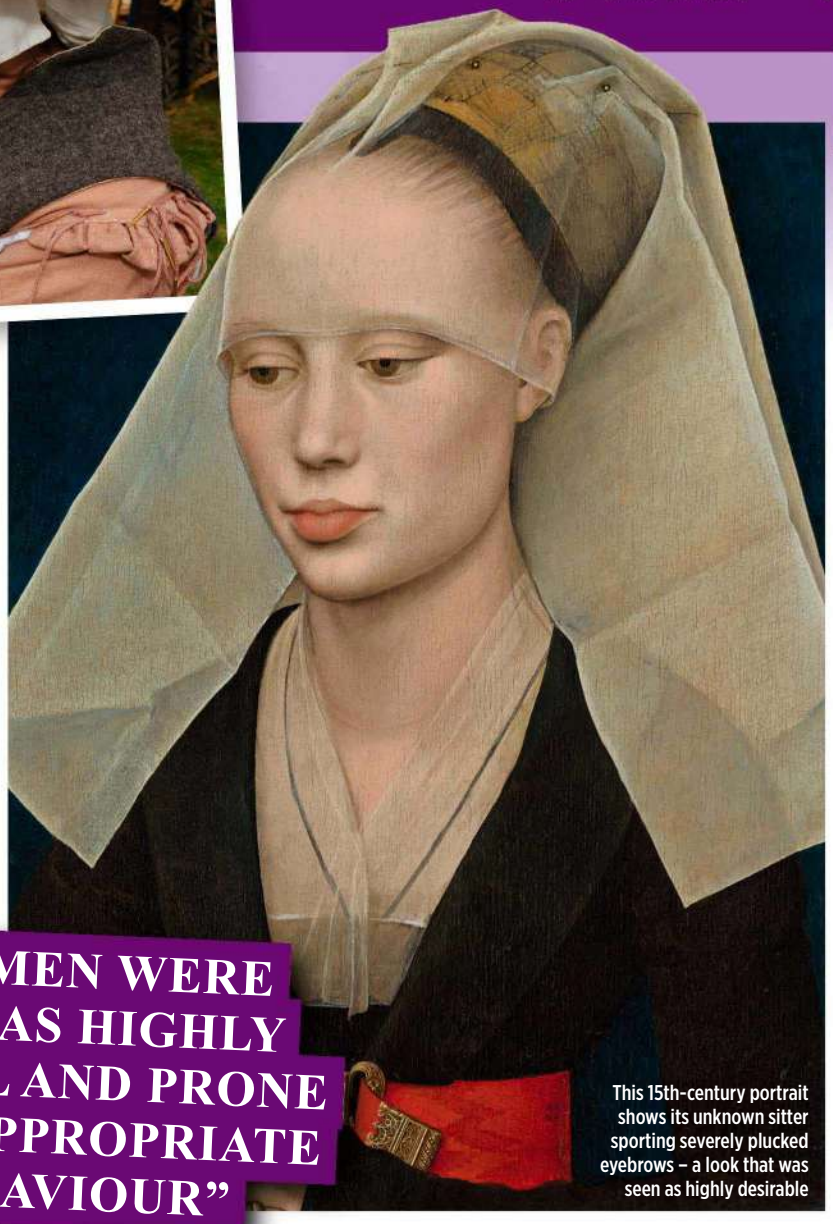
Additionally, various charms and practices were often employed. London's Wellcome Collection, for example, holds a fascinating charm resembling a measuring tape, which has prayers to the Virgin Mary inscribed on it. It was believed that binding it around the waist during childbirth would provide extra protection from the Virgin herself. The fact that women resorted to such measures highlights the perceived dangers of childbirth and the stakes that were involved.



BELOW: **Hildegard of Bingen (*right*) is widely considered to be one of the most influential women of the Middle Ages, known for her achievements in music, philosophy and science**

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X2





This 15th-century portrait shows its unknown sitter sporting severely plucked eyebrows – a look that was seen as highly desirable

"WOMEN WERE SEEN AS HIGHLY SEXUAL AND PRONE TO INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR"

Q: What were medieval beauty standards like for women?

A: There was a strong emphasis on hair removal. High foreheads were very fashionable, so women would pluck their hair to move their hairline back, creating a larger forehead. Plucking eyebrows was also common and even hair removal from the legs and genitals was practised, particularly among higher-class women. Women employed various methods to do this, including shaving and plucking, but they also used recipes found in texts like the *Trotula*, which started as a medical manual but also contained beauty-related recipes. Some of these recipes were pretty extreme, involving ingredients like quicklime, which would probably have removed more than just hair!

There was something of a moral panic surrounding excessive hair removal and stories circulated warning women against overplucking, often with religious undertones. One tale recounted a woman who ended up in hell with demons gnawing at her forehead and eyebrows as punishment for her vanity and excessive hair plucking.

Makeup was certainly used during the medieval period. Recipes existed for making rouge and lipstick, as well as skin-whitening agents, since the desired look was pale, white skin, often described in poems as "skin of snow and roses". They also had creams for sunburn and used perfumes, although there were societal judgments regarding the amount of perfume one could wear. It was acceptable for women to wear perfume, but not so much that it could be smelled from a distance; if a man across the room could smell the scent, it was considered too flirtatious.

The wearing of makeup was sometimes criticised as misleading men or being deceptive. There are even records of court cases in which men argued that sex workers wearing makeup had tricked them and therefore shouldn't be paid. Surprisingly, the court would side with the man and demand the money back, even though this seems unreasonable. But despite these moral concerns, women still engaged in a variety of beauty practices.

INTERVIEW: EMILY BRIFFETT

TOP LEFT: **Medieval makeup featured ingredients that seem unusual today. Here, a reenactor applies lipstick made from mutton fat and madder root to another woman's face**

ABOVE LEFT: **Given the inherent risks of medieval childbirth, midwives often held an esteemed position within society**

DR ELEANOR JANEGA is a historian specialising in sexuality, propaganda, the urban experience and apocalyptic thought in the late medieval period. Her latest book is *The Once and Future Sex: Going Medieval on Women's Roles in Society* (WW Norton & Co, 2023)

GET HOOKED

LISTEN
You can hear a longer version of this interview on the *HistoryExtra* podcast. To listen, scan the QR code shown here or visit *historyextra.com/medieval-women-qa*

An idealised depiction of a medieval home, featuring a pair of well-dressed women deep in conversation as male servants carry out their duties. Most women did not have it so easy

DOMESTIC BLISS?

From raising children to baking bread, medieval women were forced to bear the brunt of the household duties

"Domesticity was the major expectation that medieval Europe had for women. They would marry. They would become mothers. They would look after their children and homes."

As outlined by Dr Eleanor Janega in her book *The Once and Future Sex*, it wasn't the only expectation placed upon them. "While women were first and foremost wives and mothers, they were never considered *just* that. To be a medieval woman was to be a worker, even if that work was not necessarily valued in the same way men's labour was." Janega goes further: "The idea that women largely existed in a domestic bubble wholly removed from the realities of labour and work would have seemed laughable to medieval people. In all classes of society, women worked and were expected to do so."

In a largely agricultural society, women did the same work out in the fields as men, often enjoying a similar status, what the writer Martha Gill has described as "a sort of rough and ready empowerment". And it empowered both married and single women alike. With up to a third of the female working population yet to find a husband (or yet to even start looking), employment was a way of improving their economic status before submerging into domesticity. Although brides could be as young as 12, the average age for a lower-class medieval woman to get married was double that. Delaying the onset of married life and parenthood had its advantages, as explained by Toni Mount, author of *The Medieval Housewife*.

"By the 14th and 15th centuries, the daughters of labourers and artisans often left home at the age of 12 or 13 to work for others as servants and apprentices. Away

Milking cows and making cheese were just two of the chores that a medieval housewife could be expected to carry out on top of her duties inside the home

GETTY IMAGES X5

from direct parental control, they were far freer to choose their own marriage partner than a young aristocratic girl whose parents regarded her marriage as a means to consolidate their property or expand their network of allies."

In finding work in higher-class households – perhaps as nursemaids or kitchen assistants, roles which would provide experience for the later demands of married life – these young women would also see the noblewomen of the house just as defined by their place in the home as wives who occupied rungs further down the social ladder. Others might be doing the grimy domestic tasks, but here were no ladies of leisure. They were too occupied with managing their staff and keeping a tight rein on the complicated household budgets.

ROMANTIC CONTRACTS

Whatever parity between the sexes existed in certain medieval workplaces disappeared when the working day was finally over. The notion of the household tasks being shared never crossed the threshold of the family home. The working day was over for the husband, but for his wife, the duties were unrelenting. "Marriage was not a romantic partnership but a contract," declares Dr Eleanor Janega. Her words echo those of the fourth to fifth-century priest, and later saint, Jerome. "Men marry, indeed, so as to get a manager for the house."

The medieval housewife not only carried out all the domestic chores, she also had to undertake the necessary preparation that each individual task required. She baked the bread, so she milled the flour. She made the cheese, so she milked the cow. She served the beer, so she brewed the ale. She mended the clothes, so she spun the yarn. She lit the fire, so she gathered the wood. She bathed the children, so she collected the water from the well.

Aside from all the tasks within the home, the medieval housewife was also responsible for tending whatever garden or patch of land the family had access to. Here, her multi-tasking abilities and resourcefulness came to the fore again. Managed well, the garden would be the source of fruit, vegetables, medicines and even perfumes.

There was also the not-insignificant matter of motherhood. With up to half the number of children born in the Middle Ages not seeing their seventh birthday, the unrelenting pressure to provide heirs was great. Not only did successive pregnancies put a medieval woman in medical danger time and again, but the burden of raising the couple's offspring fell exclusively in her lap. It was another major duty to add to all the others.

A SENSE OF SORORITY

The medieval housewife's domestic duties also took her away from the family home. The washing of clothes was often performed communally on the banks of a nearby stream, giving women the opportunity to chat and gossip and moan about their respective lots. It was a chance to share experiences, to compare marriages, to seek solace.

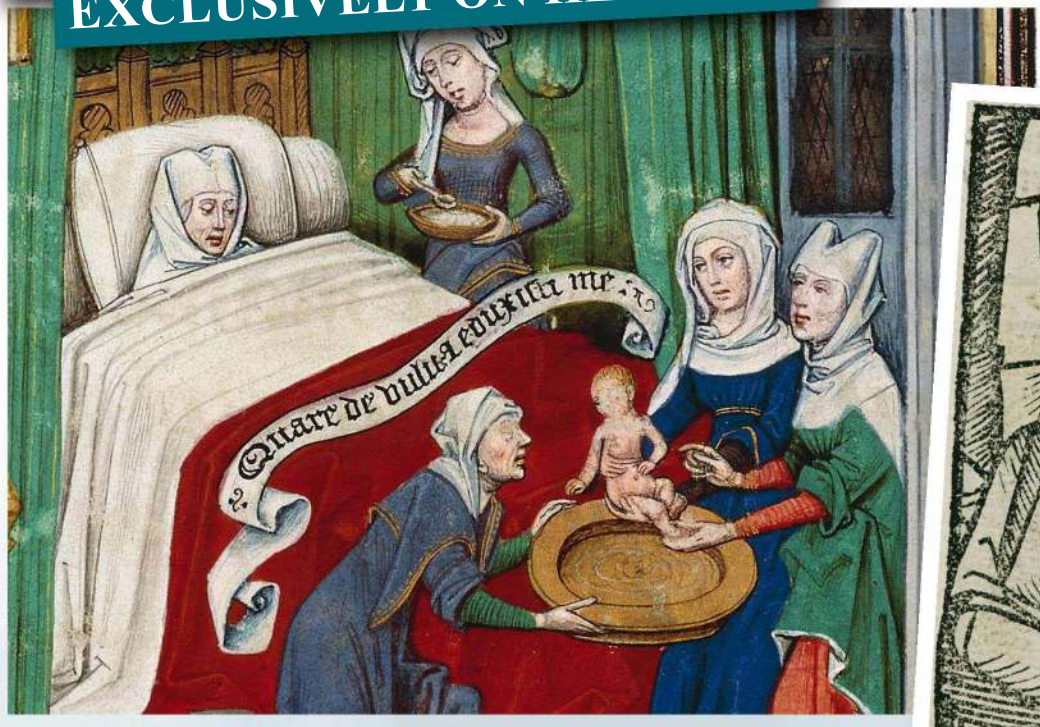
This sense of sorority helped to shape the medieval woman's worldview and self-determination. During the latter stages of the Middle Ages, women's rights improved in certain spheres, one of which was property. "Jointures developed," explains Professor Marion ▶

TOP RIGHT: **Chores could vary – this image from a 15th-century health manual shows a woman applying herbs to clothes in a bid to get rid of moths**

BOTTOM RIGHT: **Another image from the same book shows a woman delousing a man with the aid of a brush and a bowl**

BOTTOM LEFT: **Women were under immense pressure to produce children – but multiple pregnancies could put their health at risk**

"THE BURDEN OF RAISING THE COUPLE'S OFFSPRING FELL EXCLUSIVELY ON HER LAP"



Unlike monks, nuns were not required to memorise texts; these women are singing with the aid of missals (liturgical books)

A 13th-century wedding. Failure to marry could have severe social – and financial – implications for women during the Middle Ages

"MEDIEVAL WOMEN LATER BECAME A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION TO LEADING SUFFRAGETTES"

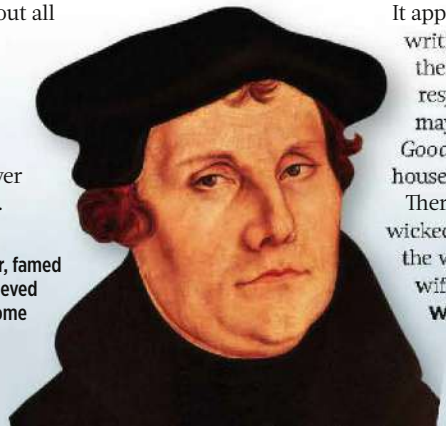
Turner, author of *The Wife of Bath: A Biography*, "allowing a woman to own property jointly with her husband, so that she could bequeath it as she wished. In some cases, we even see women disposing of jointly owned property against their husbands' desires."

Although still working from sunrise to sunset (and beyond) undertaking innumerable, often back-breaking duties, a sense of progress was emerging. Speaking out against a life of domestic drudgery was even possible, especially when men weren't around. Advice could be forcefully offered to any single woman within earshot, suggesting the comparatively easy life of the nunnery might be more attractive than the continual pressure of the marital home.

REDUCED OPPORTUNITIES

In time, the nunnery was largely removed from the options an unmarried woman had, thanks to the arrival of the Reformation, as Dr Janina Ramirez, in her book *Femina*, explains. "The Reformation impacted women significantly. As convents closed, opportunities available to women narrowed to being a wife and being a mother. Nuns were returned to their families or made to marry, and educational opportunities were increasingly restricted throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. The relegation of women to the role of second sex was firmly embedded in Protestant communities, with Martin Luther stating 'the wife should stay at home and look after the affairs of the household as one who has been deprived of the ability of administering those affairs that are outside and concern the state'."

In those post-medieval times, that "rough and ready empowerment" which women in the Middle Ages had enjoyed through workplace parity dissolved. Their property and commercial rights were withdrawn and they were increasingly confined to the home. Several centuries later, after women's subjugation during both the Reformation and the Renaissance, medieval women became a source of inspiration to some leading suffragettes, including Emily Wilding Davison. "Her view of the medieval world was one rich in diversity," writes Ramirez. "She found inspiring voices that had since been suppressed." In their ability to successfully carry out all their domestic duties while living parallel lives as paid employees, the medieval housewives proved an inspiration, even if their eternally heavy load was never lightened by their husbands.



Protestant reformer Martin Luther, famed for his *Ninety-five Theses*, firmly believed that a woman's place was in the home

MARRIAGE WOES

Women who failed to tie the knot could find themselves facing public scorn

In England in 1377, as many as a third of adult women were single, a figure that didn't even include widows or nuns. Lacking financial security, many women in poverty delayed getting married in order to raise themselves socially and economically through work. Therefore, the towns and cities, where work was easier to come by, had a disproportionately high number of single women. As well as doing so to improve their day-to-day existences, they worked hard in order to build up a dowry and make themselves more marriageable.

When it came to sexual relations, these single women weren't necessarily inexperienced, but with sex outside marriage being frowned upon, social scorn was common, as the historian Professor Maryanne Kowaleski has pointed out. "In medieval Europe, with its strict classification of women as virgins, wives and widows, any woman who did not fit into one of three categories risked being equated with membership of the only identifiable, demarcated group that did not fit: prostitutes."

As the Middle Ages deepened, so too did the pressure on single women to marry. They faced increased difficulties in everyday life, especially when it came to accommodation, being prohibited to rent rooms or property for themselves. Marriage often became the only viable option for those needing the security of a roof over their heads.

It appears the poet Thomas Tusser, writing at the end of the period, saw the situation with clear eyes. "Some respite to husbands the weather may send," he wrote in *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie*, "but housewives' affairs have never an end." There might be no rest for the wicked, but there was very little for the working all hours medieval wife either.

WORDS: NIGE TASSELL

GETTY IMAGES X3

6 TRAILBLAZING MEDIEVAL WOMEN

Everyone has heard of Joan of Arc, but which other women left an indelible mark on the Middle Ages? **Professor Susan Signe Morrison** delves into the lives of six additional figures you should know

HROTSVIT OF GANDERSHEIM
(c935–c1000)

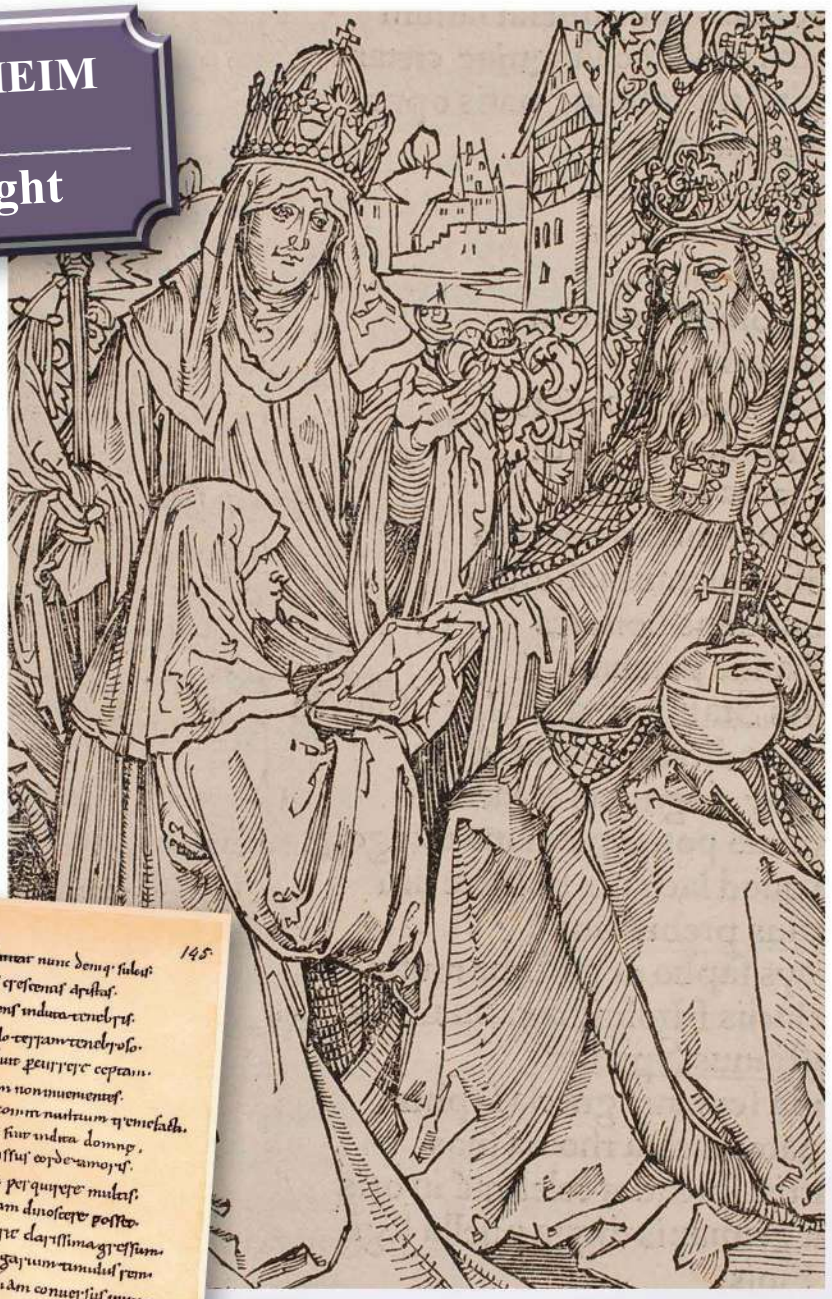
The first female playwright

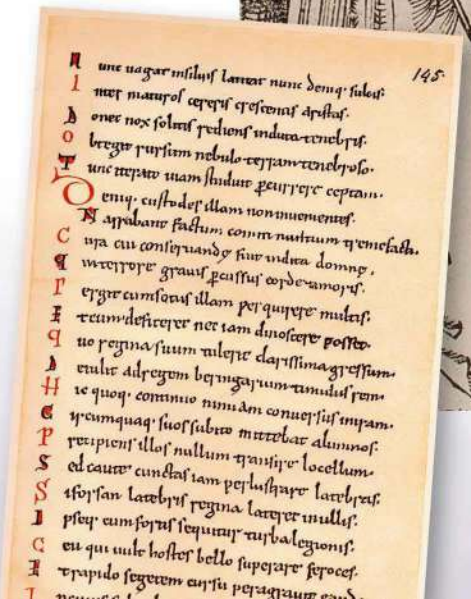
The 10th-century Saxon canoness Hrotsvit of Gandersheim called herself "the strong voice of Gandersheim". She had numerous firsts to her credit: first medieval playwright, first female playwright, first female German poet and first female German historian.

Dedicating her works to various family members of Holy Roman Emperor Otto the Great, Hrotsvit was highly educated in both the *quadrivium* (music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy) and the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic), as well as key writings by Christian theologians. Hrotsvit was also well-versed in Roman pagan authors, whose immoral comedies featured love affairs and women of suspect reputation, embodying the worst of misogynist beliefs. Hrotsvit took these well-plotted, but immoral, plays and turned them into admirable dramas featuring worthy women and weak men. Girls stood up to those who did not let them lead the lives they chose.

Hrotsvit put to vellum the first-known dramas since the classical period. Her plays extol females, from strong virgins to prostitute saints, willing to sacrifice themselves for God. What could have been happier for a devout medieval Christian than to end up in heaven? Her heroines include young girls, one as young as eight, who stand up defiantly under torture and humiliation from pagan Roman officials. One holy virgin tells the violent emperor, "I have called him a fool, I now call him a fool, and I shall call him a fool as long as I live." Nothing frightens her.

Interestingly, Hrotsvit also uses misogynistic stereotypes about women – that they are more physically weak than men, for example – to argue the very opposite. Hrotsvit even has two fallen women as her heroines, who exemplify the category of the 'holy harlot', as seen most famously in the life of Saint Mary of Egypt.





ABOVE: **An illustration shows Hrotsvit presenting one of her works to Otto the Great, who served as Holy Roman Emperor between 962 and 973**
LEFT: **A page of Hrotsvit's writings concerning Otto's wife, Adelaide of Italy**

GETTY IMAGES X1, ALAMY X1

Margaret of Beverley found herself caught up in the 1187 siege of Jerusalem, when the holy city came under a fierce attack from the Ayyubid sultan Saladin

MARGARET OF BEVERLEY
(c1150–c1214/15)

The fighting crusader

Margaret of Beverley, born in Jerusalem to English pilgrim parents, returned to the Holy Land just as the great Muslim leader Saladin decided to reclaim Jerusalem from Christian control. Margaret lived in Jerusalem as the city came under siege by Saladin's troops in September 1187. Mobbed with refugees from other defeated cities, Jerusalem was surrounded by enemy soldiers. No food or water could enter. Everyone living in this urban nightmare had to participate in its defence.

Forced to stay, Margaret set to work. "Like a fierce virago, I tried to play the role of a man," her brother records her saying. She told how, "During this siege, which lasted 15 days, I carried out all of the functions of a soldier that I could. I wore a breastplate like a man; I came and went on the ramparts, with a cauldron on my head for a helmet. Though a woman, I seemed a warrior, I threw the weapon; though filled with fear, I learned to conceal my weakness."

The heat was blistering. Those inside had to battle continually to prevent their enemies from entering. Women helped by using weapons and machines such as catapults when not enough men were available, filling in ditches and providing food and drink. Once, when Margaret gave water to the men to drink, a catapult sent a rock the size of a millstone over the walls. It burst apart. A small piece of stone flew off and struck her, causing blood to gush out. Margaret carried the scar throughout her life.

About two weeks after the tumult had begun, the siege was over. Later enduring imprisonment, torture and humiliation, Margaret ultimately gained her freedom and returned to Europe, becoming a Cistercian lay sister in a French nunnery.

DID YOU KNOW?

LUPINE PURSUIT

Margaret was born while her parents were on a pilgrimage. According to accounts written by her brother, the family spent their travels being pursued by a wolf – which was only kept at bay by Margaret's father, who scared it off by shaking a tree branch.

GETTY IMAGES X1, ALAMY X2

HÉLOÏSE D'ARGENTEUIL
(c1100–64)

The scandalous nun

Before she had even reached her 20th birthday, Héloïse d'Argenteuil was renowned as the most educated woman in Europe. Peter Abelard, arguably the most brilliant philosopher of his time, had already caused an uproar among the intellectual classes. No diplomat, Peter alienated respectable older theologians, making enemies.

Héloïse's uncle, Fulbert, a clergyman at the church of Notre-Dame on the Île de la Cité in Paris, hired Peter, who gladly took on the role of tutor to this young girl. Peter later wrote how he intended to break his lifelong chastity with this student entrusted to him. Featuring a pregnant teenager and the older teacher who seduced her, this scandalous affair stemming from 1118 became the gossip of Paris.

Soon after they met, Héloïse and Peter exchanged amorous glances – looks that transformed into touches. As Peter openly confessed, "My hands strayed oftener to her bosom than to the pages." They soon were enjoying carnal embraces. "[O]ur desires left no stage of lovemaking untried, and if love could devise something new, we welcomed it". Héloïse's uncle remained oblivious, until he caught the lovers together. Meanwhile, Héloïse was thrilled to learn she was pregnant.

The couple secretly wed. But Peter ignored Héloïse after being tragically castrated by the henchmen of her vengeful uncle. In return, Héloïse wrote brilliant, angry and passionate letters. Boldly proclaiming, "It would be dearer and more honourable to me to be called not his Empress but your whore," she understood her passion to be authentically motivated; the true whores were those women who married for position and money. Amazingly, scholars once refused to believe that a woman could have written such intelligent letters.

Ultimately, Héloïse became abbess at the Paraclete, a religious hermitage with daughter houses, six of which were set up under Héloïse's rule. She remained abbess until her death.

"SCHOLARS REFUSED TO BELIEVE THAT SHE COULD HAVE WRITTEN SUCH INTELLIGENT LETTERS"

BELOW LEFT: **Abelard and Héloïse's illicit love affair, conducted when the latter was in her teens, became the talk of 12th-century Paris**

BELOW RIGHT: **An early 19th-century effigy of the couple lies at Père-Lachaise cemetery, in the centre of the French capital**

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN
(1098–1179)

The audacious innovator

Female scientists were active in both practical and theoretical medicine. The most famous of all is Hildegard of Bingen, who transcends categorisation. Scientist, doctor of medicine, musician, philosopher, theologian, mystic – Hildegard is acclaimed as the most accomplished of medieval women. A resident of medieval Germany, she explained confounding theological notions such as that of the Trinity (the Father, Son and Holy Ghost). Standing up to male superiors in the church, she often succeeded in getting her desires, including founding a new convent.

Hildegard wrote about the human body, even using poetic language to describe reproduction from a woman's perspective. Her music, much performed today, reflects her view that humans create music in an attempt to recapture the cosmically harmonious paradise lost with the fall, when Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden. In Hildegard's *Ordo Virtutum*, a liturgical drama in song, the Devil fights with the soul's virtues; only the Devil has a speaking role.

Hildegard's other writings include theological, cosmological and visionary works. "Let no man be so audacious as to add anything to this writing lest he be blotted out from the book of life," she asserts. While many medieval women turned to the divine to find meaning in their interior lives, Hildegard also commented publicly on state and church politics. Creating voluminous letters to the pope and churchmen, she corresponded on issues of salvation and church organisation.

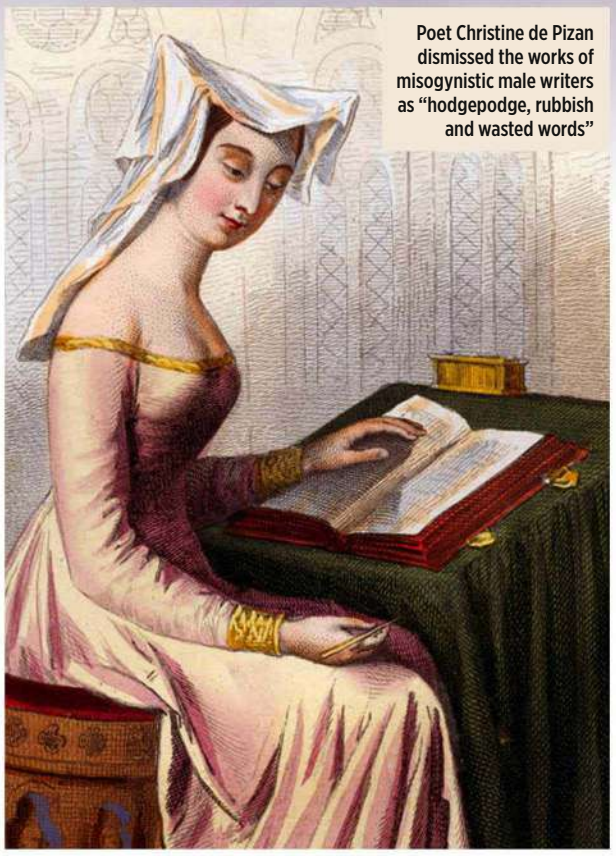
Between 1158 and c1170 Hildegard also undertook four preaching tours – extraordinary in a time when women were expected to obey Saint Paul's injunction to not teach or speak in the church.

GETTY IMAGES X1, ALAMY X2, BRIDGEMAN X1

ABOVE: **A manuscript illumination shows Hildegard of Bingen receiving 'divine inspiration' from above**
RIGHT: **Hildegard speaks with fellow nuns. The polymath was not afraid to have her say on church doctrine**

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN
(1364–c1430)

The vocal feminist



Poet Christine de Pizan dismissed the works of misogynistic male writers as "hodgepodge, rubbish and wasted words"

Feminist beliefs were espoused unashamedly by some trailblazing medieval women. The brilliant Christine de Pizan, for instance, was raised by an unconventional father who supported Christine's desire to study and learn. Her arranged marriage at the age of 15 became a love match. When tragedy struck, cutting down both her father and husband in the prime of life, the 25-year-old Christine was suddenly left in charge of the extended household.

Christine had been left with no knowledge of how the financial accounts were arranged. She was even cheated by people claiming false debts. Initiating a feminist critique of marriage that still resounds today, she laments: "For it was the custom for married men not to talk about or declare the complete state of their affairs to their wives… it makes no sense unless women, instead of being ignorant, learn wise management of such matters."

Christine had few options. "Now it was necessary for me to go to work, something which I, nurtured on the finer things of life, had not learned". While initially she copied manuscripts as a scribe, she then became the first European professional female writer. Defying misogynist writers, calling anti-woman invective "hodgepodge, rubbish and wasted words", Christine boldly proclaimed to one anti-woman writer, "You have committed a great error without reason."

In her masterpiece from 1404–05, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine envisions an allegorical city populated only by women and ruled by the Virgin Mary. In this prose text, Christine asserts how women are responsible for creating all good culture, politics and science. She argues that women should be allowed to be what everyone should be given – the right to be human.

Her final poem, published in 1429, extols a young maiden as embodying all that is fine about womanhood – none other than Joan of Arc.

MARGARET PASTON
(c1421/3–84)

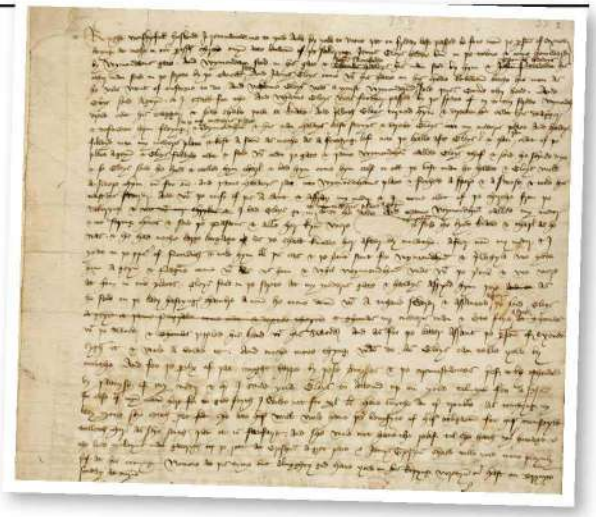
The matchless matriarch

With shades of *Real Housewives of the Middle Ages*, estate manager Margaret Paston protected her extended family's vast properties during the Wars of the Roses, a time of violence and disruption. As adept and well-versed in legal intricacies as her male lawyer counterparts who were away in London, she defended the homestead, bidding her husband to send weapons such as crossbows and axes should enemies attack.

In addition to protecting her lands and informing her husband of crises, Margaret undertook the activities that any woman would have to do to support an estate or even modest farm: making bread and wine, brewing ale, smoking ham and bacon, and drying fruit for the winter months. She oversaw the care of pigs, poultry and cows. Needlecraft, such as embroidery, weaving, clothmaking and mending, lay within a woman's sphere. Given the Pastons' estates and property, Margaret consulted with tenants, negotiated legal claims, and sought out (and gave) judicial advice.

Estate management also included selling products manufactured on the farm, such as foodstuffs, cloth and grain, as well as ordering supplies from larger cities in the area. Making and maintaining connections with powerful individuals who would support her during these turbulent times, Margaret had to borrow jewellery when she finally met Queen Margaret of Anjou, wife of King Henry VI.

In Jane Austen's classic novel *Northanger Abbey*, completed in 1803, the heroine Catherine Morland laments, "I read [history] a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all – it is very tiresome…"



Margaret Paston sent letters to her husband when he was away. This example from 1448 reveals how the family's chaplain was subjected to an assault

Poor Catherine! If only she could come back today, when much medieval history focuses on gender and the everyday experiences of the vibrant, dynamic and unexpected lives of women from the medieval period.

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MATRIARCHS AND MYSTICS

The most powerful women were those who were born into royalty – but that didn't mean their lives were easy

In the Middle Ages, power was undoubtedly a male-dominated game. But while the independence and influence of many women during the medieval period was overwhelmingly curtailed by the patriarchal society, some women found ways to wield power that have echoed down through the centuries.

For the ultimate medieval powerhouse, look no further than 12th-century queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, arguably more famous than either of her royal husbands. She governed as regent on behalf of two kings, secured a divorce from another, and was matriarch of a royal dynasty that saw five of her nine surviving children crowned kings or queens. She even went on crusade to encourage French barons and lords to take the cross themselves.

As testament to her immense political and diplomatic skill, during efforts to raise a ransom for her son, King Richard, in 1193–94, she levied a network of influential women that stretched from Brittany to Bavaria.

ECONOMIC FREEDOMS

Though Queen Eleanor's power might seem extraordinary for the era, her achievements amplify one of the common ways that other women, as widows, were able to gain control of property in the period. They would also routinely preside over their children's affairs, lending them means and power. Particularly in the wake of the 14th-century Black Death pandemic, there was a period of relative economic freedom for some women in London, as they were encouraged to run their husbands' workshops or trading enterprises, to maintain the flows of currency and taxation.

While the statuses of many medieval women were dependent on marriage, it wasn't the only way to power; some women were named heirs in their own right. Also in the Holy Land at the same time as Queen Eleanor was Melisende, the ruling queen of Jerusalem. Born in the early 12th century, eldest daughter of Baldwin II of Jerusalem, Melisende was designated her father's heir and raised as a capable successor. However, strategic necessity dictated that during her later marriage to Fulk, Count of Anjou, she share power with her husband. The pair ruled together, issued joint charters, and embarked on a substantial building programme across Jerusalem, and according to chronicler William of Tyre, Fulk "did not attempt to take the initiative, even in trivial matters," without the queen's knowledge.

Though Tyre also recorded that, following Fulk's death in 1143, Melisende ruled "skilfully", her fate was still beholden to her male relatives; Melisende was only able to inherit jointly with her son, Baldwin III. She was later challenged by her son and fighting erupted across the kingdom, showing the precarious nature of female power in this period. Melisende was eventually forced to relinquish power, and she retired to a convent.

DESCENT INTO ANARCHY

Another snubbed heir who famously took to battle over her claim was Matilda. Despite being named heir to the English throne by her father, Henry I, Matilda's cousin, Stephen, threw the country into a 19-year, blood-soaked feud known as the Anarchy.

Matilda is a famous example of a medieval woman pursuing and wielding great power – but she also distils the reactions of many to powerful women in this period. Historian Henry of Huntingdon declared that "she was lifted up into an insufferable arrogance... and she alienated the hearts of almost everyone". Another historian of the period wrote that "she displayed an intolerable pride and wilfulness". As a far cry from the medieval ideal of a pious and gentle wife, Matilda faced an uphill struggle to gain support, and ultimately, she gave up her claim.

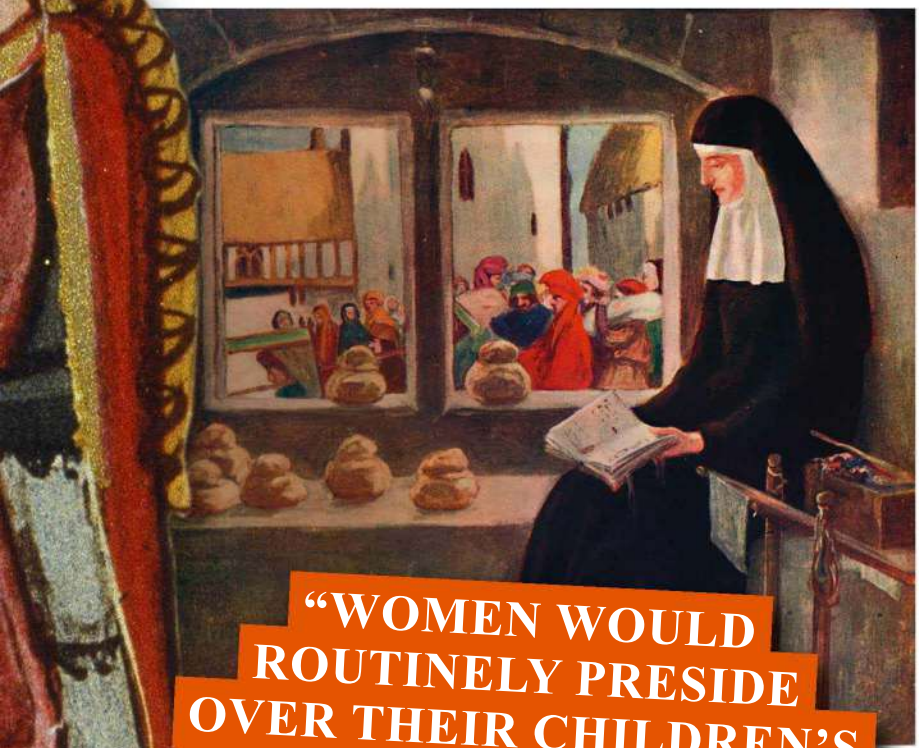
For other medieval women, the pen was mightier than the sword, lending them a quieter (and certainly less violent) route to power and autonomy. Julian of Norwich, a late 14th-century anchoress, retreated into religious isolation in her forties, which avoided the need for marriage or remarriage, and protected any individual wealth. Her mystical text, *Revelations of Divine Love*, has been revised in recent years as one of the most stunning literary achievements of the medieval period, and her enduring influence can be seen in her oft-quoted line: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

WORDS: ELINOR EVANS

Queen Melisende of Jerusalem became embroiled in a vicious power struggle with her own son, Baldwin III

AKG-IMAGES X1, GETTY IMAGES X1, ALAMY X4

Despite being named heir to the English throne, Empress Matilda (*pictured*) was prevented from taking power by her cousin, Stephen. The turmoil led to a 19-year conflict known as the Anarchy

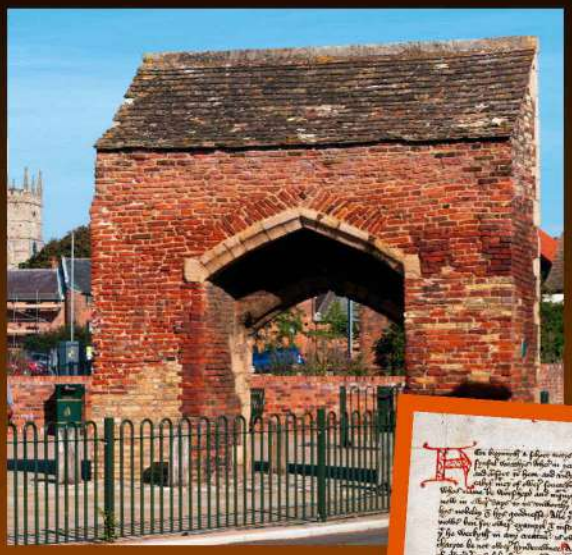


"WOMEN WOULD ROUTINELY PRESIDE OVER THEIR CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS, LENDING THEM MEANS AND POWER"

ABOVE: **The writings of Julian of Norwich, inspired by religious visions she experienced after falling ill, are still the source of much fascination today**

LEFT: **Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was married to Louis VII of France and later Henry II of England, was one of the wealthiest women in Europe**

The remains of the Carmelite friary in King's Lynn, Norfolk, where Friar Aleyn – who is said to have transcribed Margery Kempe's biography – resided. Only one copy of the manuscript (*below right*) survives today



MEDIEVAL INFLUENCERS

The lack of a mass media wasn't necessarily a barrier to achieving widespread fame

Some medieval women took to the practice of pilgrimage to spread their beliefs. Margery Kempe is one of several notable female mystics who, though not nuns, made their name on the road. After suffering a period of crisis in the late 14th century, Kempe began to experience visions of Christ, and became a visually recognisable figure during her journeys across Europe. Dressed in white and in a state of near-constant weeping, her displays of devotion gained such a reputation that she attended audiences with other prominent religious figures of the day. Though some have reconsidered Kempe's story through modern understandings of mental illness, her power as an influencer is shown in her 15th-century dictated book, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the earliest-known autobiography in English, which offered a new perspective on the female middle-class medieval experience.

Religion wasn't the only way to harness power as a tastemaker. 'Arib al-Ma'muniyya was an enslaved woman in ninth-century Iraq, who became skilled in courtly etiquette – she could ride, recite poetry and play several instruments – and rose to prominence through serving at the courts of eight caliphs. She is credited with writing some 1,000 songs, and by her later years (she died in her nineties) she was a wealthy woman who had bought her freedom. Overall, she was regarded by contemporaries as a master of musical traditions and styles, and an arbiter of taste in the Iraqi courts.

PIOUS PIONEERS

Although men still called the shots, women played an active and important role in the development of the medieval church

Catherine of Siena clearly wasn't a fan of the easy life. The Italian mystic and author could have rested on her laurels in her home town in Tuscany, where she had gained a reputation for her dedication to the sick and poor, and her ecstatic visions. Instead, she decided to embark on a mission to save the Catholic Church and bring peace to Italy.

And so, in the mid-1370s, Catherine set out to foster peace within the church, and encourage Pope Gregory XI to quit Avignon (which had been the seat of popes since 1309) and return to the papacy's traditional home in Rome. Shortly after, Gregory entrusted Catherine with the thorny task of negotiating a peace with the rebellious city of Florence.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

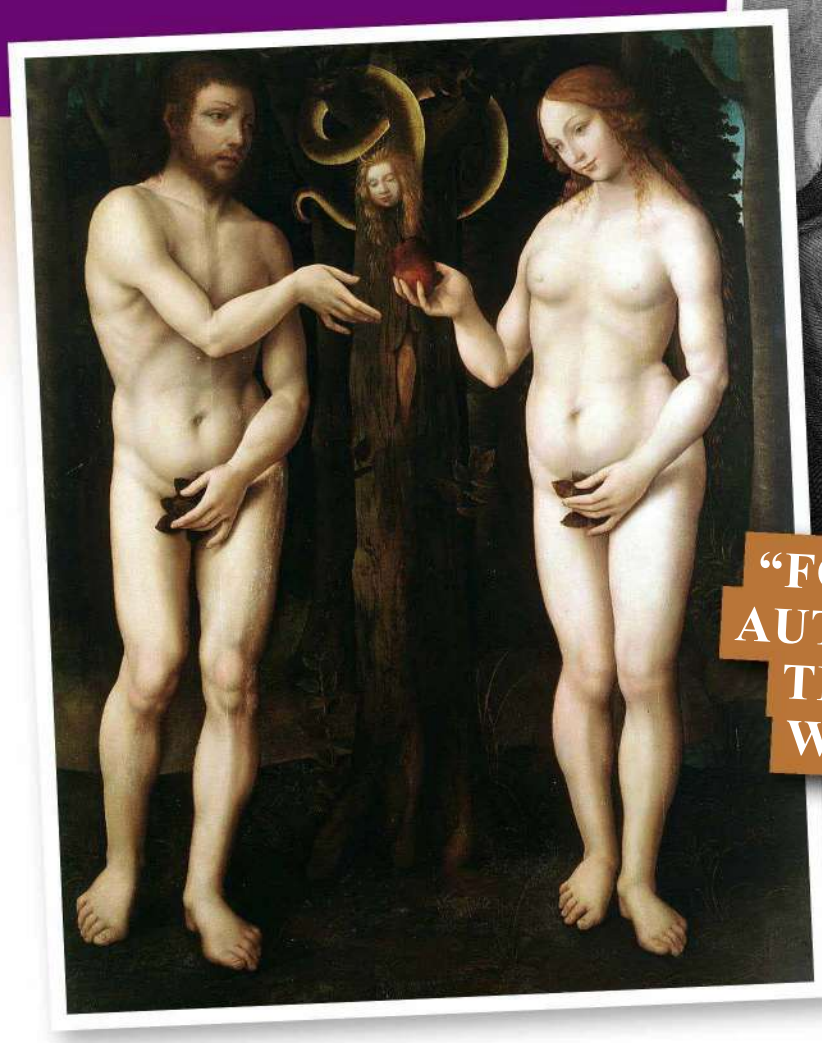
Pope Urban VI, who succeeded Gregory to the papacy in 1378, was equally reliant on Catherine's talents. She sent out numerous letters to princes and cardinals on his behalf, calling on obedience to his new administration, and played a leading role in his efforts to reorganise the church.

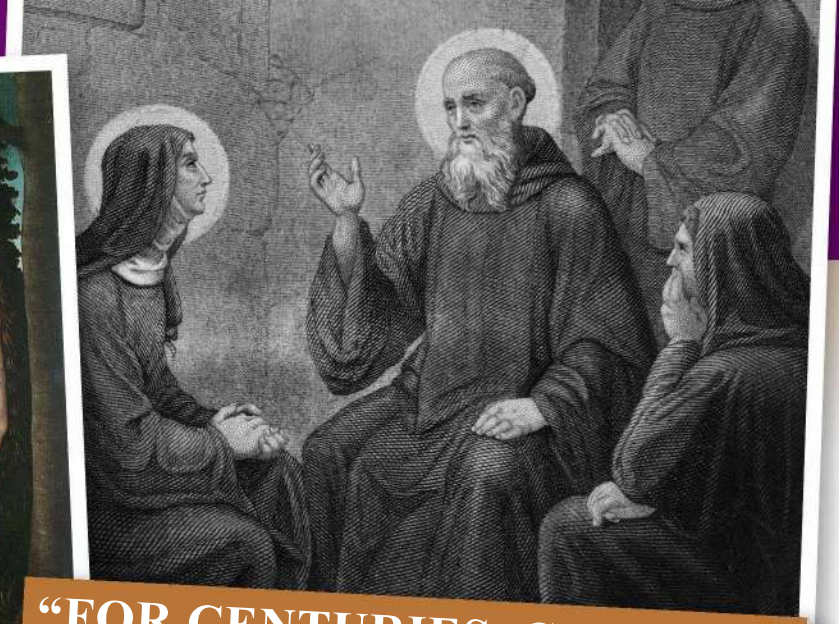
Catherine didn't succeed in all her endeavours, yet few doubt the massive impact she had on Catholicism in the late 14th century. That impact is reflected in the fact that, since her death in 1380, she has been canonised, declared a doctor of the church, and made a patron saint of Europe. It's an impressive roll-call of honours. And it's one that's made all the more remarkable by the fact that Catherine of Siena was a woman.

Ever since an ancient scribe opined that, having eaten the forbidden fruit, Eve was responsible for man's expulsion from paradise, women have had a complicated relationship with the church. For centuries, the authorities promulgated the belief that women were inferior to men; that they were morally weaker

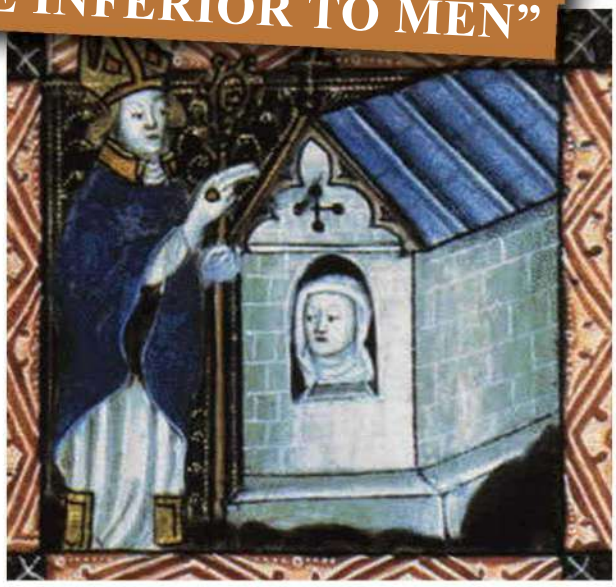
ABOVE: **A painting depicts Catherine of Siena imploring Pope Gregory XI to leave Avignon and bring the papacy back to Rome – a plea that was eventually successful**
LEFT: **Gregory XI's successor, Urban VI, also had a close bond with Catherine; during his time as pope, he sent out letters demanding that cardinals and princes show loyalty to him**

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X2





"FOR CENTURIES, CLERICAL AUTHORITIES PROMULGATED THE BELIEF THAT WOMEN WERE INFERIOR TO MEN"



and prone to lure humanity from the path of God's teachings.

This was certainly a popular view in the Middle Ages. By portraying the serpent in the Garden of Eden with a female head, artists left their audiences in little doubt that they held women responsible for Eve's 'original sin'.

SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

Women's perceived weakness may also have been reflected in seating arrangements in some medieval church services. Women attended church just as often as men (up to five times a day for prayer and at least once a week for services and confession). Yet within the confines of some churches, the two genders may have been separated, with women placed on the north side, and men on the south. Why? Well, the north side, the one presided over by the Virgin Mary, was considered to be the side of the saved. Women were seated here because they were deemed to be more open to temptation.

Despite such prejudices, women played an active and important role in the medieval church, in a number of guises. And while not all had the ear of princes and popes, like Catherine of Siena, they did so in their thousands.

The first port of call for medieval women seeking to dedicate their lives to the service of God was often a nunnery. Legend has it that Saint Benedict of Nursia (father of the Benedictine monastic order) had a twin sister called Scholastica, who founded the first convent of Benedictine nuns near Monte Cassino in the sixth century. Whether that tradition is true or not, nunneries quickly became an established part of the medieval landscape.

There's an image of the nunnery being a place where ageing aristocrats who had fallen foul of those in power (women like Elizabeth Woodville, widow of King Edward IV) were put out to pasture: out of sight, out of mind. "Get thee to a nunnery!" Hamlet famously tells Ophelia following an argument between the two. Yet that's far from the full picture.

BREAD AND HERRINGS

Nuns may have lived austere existences – taking vows of chastity, renouncing worldly goods and devoting themselves to prayer – but theirs proved an attractive way of life to many medieval women. It offered an education, the prospect of expression through theology, poetry and music, and an alternative to the constraints of marriage and the mortal dangers of childbirth. And it also gave them the opportunity to do the work of God in the community. Founded in 1232 by Ela, Countess of Salisbury, Laycock Abbey's 25 nuns were among those who gave out bread and herrings to 100 peasants on each anniversary of the founder's death.

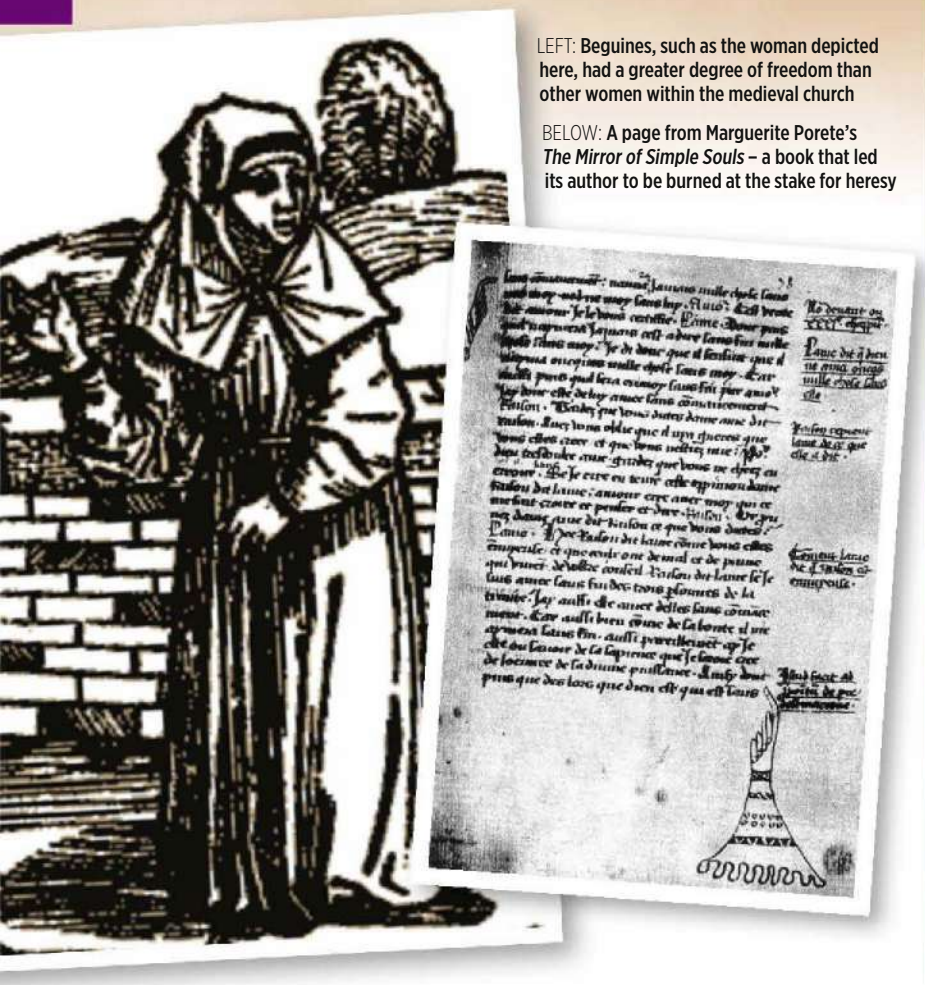
Nuns certainly led abstemious lives but, when compared with a select band of female believers called the anchoresses, their self-denial barely registers. The word 'anchorite' comes from the Greek 'to retire', and that's exactly what anchoresses did, retiring from secular society and living out their lives in a cell where they could focus all their energies on prayer, contemplation and, often, receiving visions from God. Just to emphasise the permanence of their situation (and their devotion), anchorites would be witnesses at their own funerals, receive the last rites, and have the door to their room sealed or bricked up.

Not all remained in the same cell for the rest of their lives, however. Margaret Kirby served as an anchoress in East Layton, North Yorkshire, in the 1340s ▶

ABOVE LEFT: **Some paintings depicting original sin show the serpent as having the head of a human female, linking women with the root of evil**

TOP RIGHT: **An image shows Saint Benedict of Nursia with his twin sister, Scholastica, who is said to have founded the first convent of Benedictine nuns**

ABOVE RIGHT: **An illumination from an early 15th-century manuscript depicts a bishop blessing an anchoress in her cell**



LEFT: **Beguines, such as the woman depicted here, had a greater degree of freedom than other women within the medieval church**

BELOW: **A page from Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls* – a book that led its author to be burned at the stake for heresy**

◀ before moving to a cell in another North Yorkshire village, Ainderby, nine years later. Christine Carpenter was released from her cell in St James' church in Shere, Surrey, but missed isolation so much that, in 1332, she was given permission to be re-enclosed.

A BURGEONING MOVEMENT

It goes without saying that becoming a nun or indeed an anchoress wasn't for everyone. Yet, as the Middle Ages advanced, those who didn't want to enter religious orders had increasing opportunities to engage in devotional practices in other ways. By the 13th and 14th centuries – particularly in northern Europe's growing cities, where people tended to be more open to new ideas – more and more women chose to become Beguines, members of the laity who were bound to no order and, if they wished, could renounce their vows and get married.

What distinguished Beguines from other branches of the medieval church was that it was a female-dominated movement. Some lived in communities of fellow Beguines; others with one or two other women. What united all of them was a passion to do good works among the sick and poor.

Yet not everyone approved of their work. Powerful voices among the church authorities appear to have been deeply suspicious of a female-led movement that included prominent mystics among its number. And, in 1310, one of those mystics, a French woman called Marguerite Porete, paid a terrible price for that suspicion.

Porete was forced to appear before the court of the inquisitorial commission to answer charges relating to her mystical book *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, widely thought to be the greatest religious tract written in Old French. Showing no remorse for having violated an injunction to withdraw the book from circulation, Porete was burned at the stake in Paris.

We can't be entirely certain why the inquisition inflicted such a brutal punishment on Porete, but the patriarchy's fear of a woman challenging their authority may well have been a factor. Women may have made a considerable contribution to the evolution of the church in the Middle Ages, but men still called the shots.

WORDS: SPENCER MIZEN

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

We take a closer look at four holy women who devoted their lives to their faith

THE ABBESS: HILDA OF WHITBY

◀ As the abbess of Whitby – a monastery for both men and women – Saint Hilda (614–680) headed one of the great religious centres of northeastern England. Not only did the monastery produce five bishops, it also hosted the Synod of Whitby of 664, which was, in part, called to decide on which date the English should celebrate Easter. According to the historian Bede, Hilda was so respected that even kings and princes sought her advice.

THE ANCHORESS: JULIAN OF NORWICH

◀ Julian (c1342– after 1416) is surely one of the most extraordinary religious figures of England's Middle Ages. Aged around 40, she agreed to dedicate the rest of her life to intense prayer and contemplation in a walled-up cell from which she would never leave. During her decades of complete isolation, she became the first woman to write a book in English, *Revelations of Divine Love*, which has seen her dubbed the 'female Chaucer'.

THE VISIONARY: BRIDGET OF SWEDEN

◀ She founded her own order of nuns, the Bridgettines, and won fame for her works of charity, while her visions of the nativity of Christ had a significant impact on later depictions of that event in works of art. Little wonder, then, that Bridget of Sweden (1303–73) is among the most celebrated holy women of the Middle Ages. Such was her influence that, in 1999, Pope John Paul II named her one of the patron saints of Europe.

THE MYSTIC: MARY OF OIGNIES

▼ The Belgian holy woman Mary of Oignies (1177–1213) was married at 14, yet soon persuaded her husband that they should abstain from sex. He agreed, and the two began working with patients at a leper colony. Mary's fame grew from her intense mystical visions which she interpreted to people while travelling and preaching. In 1207, she joined the St Nicholas convent at Oignies, where she is said to have performed a number of miracles.

An early modern image shows Mary of Oignies praying in the grounds of the St Nicholas convent

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X3

LEFT: **Medieval women carried out many of the same farming duties as men; here, a female farmer is depicted gathering green beans**

BELOW: **Some women also practised the art of brewing, as seen in this illustration**

MAKING AN HONEST LIVING

Women of the Middle Ages didn't just carry out chores at home – they crafted, created and cultivated in all manner of environments

When picturing the medieval world of work, many might think it was exclusively staffed by men – men toiled out in the sun-baked fields, nurturing and harvesting crops; men thronged the streets of towns and cities, hurrying to their workshops or stores; and men earned coin on the battlefield, wielding weapons as they charged against their foes.

But such a view doesn't accurately reflect reality. In the Middle Ages, women were embedded in industry throughout Europe, working just as hard as their male counterparts. Much of this work took place in the great outdoors. In the medieval era, up to 85 per cent of Europeans were peasants, tilling the land and cultivating crops so they and their families could survive. Men and women both worked out in the fields, and there was a stream of jobs to do from dawn until dusk. Livestock needed to be fed (this was often solely performed by women, as looking after animals was seen as a 'feminine' job); seeds had to be sown in springtime; and when it was harvest season, every available hand was needed to help bring the crops in.

Although ploughing tended to be seen as more of a man's job, as it was a more strenuous activity, women still helped – and, if they owned their own farm, they would certainly need to be handy with the plough.

BACKBREAKING TASKS

As well as tilling the land, female peasants also shouldered the additional responsibility of 'women's work' – a slew of household chores. Women had to be cooks, brewers, weavers, seamstresses, parents and teachers all rolled into one. As Dr Eleanor Janega remarks in her recent episode of the *HistoryExtra* podcast (*see page 27*): "There was an absolute surfeit of work to be done at all times. It makes me tired just thinking about it." ▶

GETTY IMAGES X1, ALAMY X1

"SOILED ITEMS WERE OFTEN SOAKED IN SUBSTANCES SUCH AS ASH OR URINE"

ABOVE LEFT: **Making and selling cheese could be a handy source of extra income**

ABOVE RIGHT: **Women unable to pay for servants would have been required to do the family's cooking**

Although you wouldn't be paid for performing these backbreaking tasks in your own home, there were ways of monetising them. Some women with income to spare would employ servants to perform the jobs they didn't have time for. For instance, some wealthier peasants had extensive dairy herds so they could sell the extra milk and cheese at market, and employed a dairy maid or two to help look after their animals. Others might advertise for a chambermaid, who could embellish textiles with delicate embroidery designs.

LAUNDRY SERVICE

Some women also offered to do the jobs that nobody enjoyed – for a price. Washing laundry was particularly despised in the Middle Ages, as it was such a time-consuming endeavour. Soiled items were often soaked in unpleasant substances such as wood ash or urine, before being carted off to the river to be washed clean. To avoid days of drudgery, many opted to pay a washerwoman to clean their clothes for them.

While some women chose to take on one of these service jobs as a medieval equivalent of a side hustle, working at their family farm and also moonlighting as a dairy maid or a washerwoman to rack up some extra cash, others saw them as a way of leaving farm life behind completely. Working in service offered social mobility, as you could climb the greasy pole and make your own money. And, as Dr Eleanor Janega points out: "Being a servant was sometimes seen as a little bit more glamorous than helping your parents with the ploughing."

Just as women mucked in on the farm, those who lived in urban areas were also no strangers to the world of work. A roster of female servants kept the homes of the well-to-do spick and span, with maids scrubbing floors, cooks sweating over stoves, and nursemaids keeping young children entertained. In other instances, women were involved in their family businesses, assisting their husbands or fathers with running shops or taverns – or, if they were an artisan, helping to produce fine goods such as textiles or metalwork.

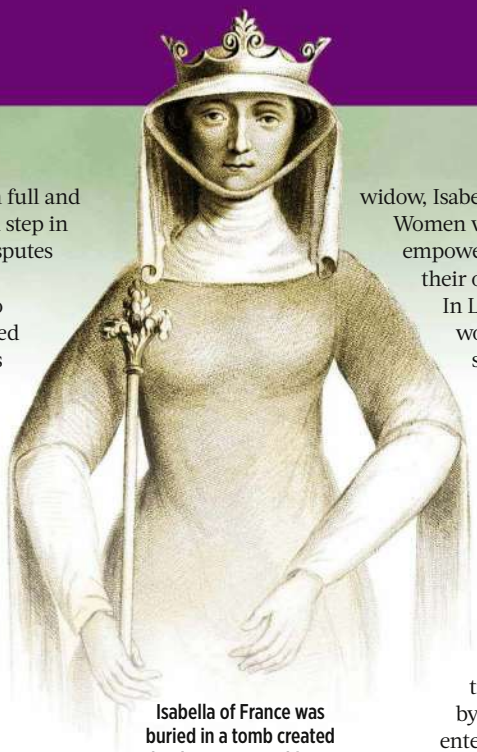
A pair of medieval reenactors wash clothes in a tub – a lengthy, and often arduous, process

BALANCING THE BOOKS

Many also had an extra helping of responsibility, particularly if they were from a wealthier background: they were the family's accountant. For middle-class women, this role could involve totting up the household's expenses, as well as keeping an eye on how the family business was performing.

However, for women who were part of the nobility, bookkeeping went to the next level. When their husbands went away to court or travelled further afield to wage war, they were left with the keys to the castle. As part of this, they had to look after family lands, make sure

GETTY IMAGES X4, ALAMY X2



Isabella of France was buried in a tomb created by the mason-architect Agnes Ramsey

taxes were paid in full and on time, and even step in to handle legal disputes where necessary. Some women also apparently followed in their husband's footsteps and travelled to the battlefield themselves – such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, who allegedly directed her own army during the Second Crusade.

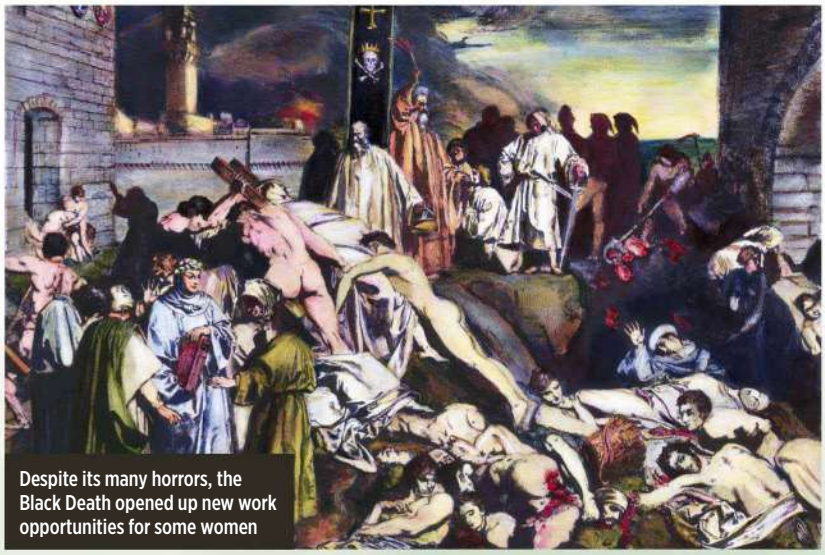
Although women worked throughout the Middle Ages, there was one period in particular that has been termed a 'golden age' for working women. Following the devastating fallout of the Black Death in the mid-14th century, which wiped out approximately 50 million people across Europe, the workers' pool had shrunk – so in many parts of the continent, women flooded in to fill it.

As people were dropping like flies during the Black Death, many left wills stipulating what they wanted to leave to their nearest and dearest. Scores of men chose to bequeath their businesses to their wives or daughters, so the trade would be kept in the family. For instance, Agnes Ramsey took over her father William Ramsey's successful architecture and masonry business after he perished from the plague. She even won a royal contract: she was paid a handsome £100 to construct the tomb of Edward II's widow, Isabella of France.

Women were also empowered to set up their own businesses. In London, married women could set up shop independently of their husbands and work as 'femmes soles'. One such trader was a woman called Maud Ireland, who made a living as a silkwoman – a highly respected trade dominated by women. Ireland entered the records when she was sued, over debts concerning a bolt of Italian silk that she had purchased.

However, by around 1500 this 'golden age' sputtered to an end. As the population began to climb once again, more people were available to work – and men were often the favoured candidates. Women remained part of the workforce, as they had always been, but they were often no longer free to ply their wares as sole traders in the capital, or to enlist as apprentices to learn new trades. Yet although opportunities had shrunk, they would come back again – and women would once more be ready to seize them with open arms.

WORDS: RHIANNON DAVIES



Despite its many horrors, the Black Death opened up new work opportunities for some women

A UNITED FRONT

Trade guilds gave women the opportunity to protect – and pass on – their crafts

Some working women decided to find strength in numbers by joining trade guilds. Similar to today's trade unions, they were dedicated to specific crafts, and designed to protect the rights of the workers who belonged to them.

Although some guilds barred women from entry entirely, others allowed female members to join under certain circumstances – such as if their spouse had belonged to the guild, and then passed away. But some guilds broke the mould entirely, and were solely operated by and for women.

For example, Rouen in France was home to two female-only textile guilds, which flexed their power in the city until they were dissolved in the 18th century. Both organisations allowed women to come together and take individuals who threatened their trading rights to court, and set up apprenticeships so that younger generations could learn how to fashion fine linen garments.

While such collectives weren't necessarily the kind of feminist utopias dreamed up by medieval writers like Christine de Pizan (internal rivalries between members could threaten to cleave guilds in two), they nevertheless give us a fascinating window into the world of medieval work.

DID YOU KNOW?

TIME TO CHIME

Following the death of her husband in 1440, London woman Johanna Hill took on the running of the family's bell foundry. Seven of her bells still exist in churches as far away as Suffolk and Devon, each stamped with her own unique mark.

A 14th-century manuscript image shows women spinning, carding and weaving wool – valuable skills that could be promoted by a trade guild

MEET THE EXPERT

DR ELEANOR JANEGA ON THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING MEDIEVAL WOMEN

DR ELEANOR JANEGA is a historian specialising in sexuality, propaganda, the urban experience and apocalyptic thought in the late medieval period. Her most recent book is *The Once and Future Sex: Going Medieval on Women's Roles in Society* (WW Norton & Co, 2023). To hear Dr Janega discuss medieval women on the *HistoryExtra* podcast, scan the QR code shown here or visit *historyextra.com/medieval-women-qa*

The focus on the extraordinary occludes the vast majority of women from history

One could be forgiven for thinking that the past was inhabited almost entirely by men. The way that history has been written means there is often an overwhelming focus on 'Great Men', leading to a relatively dry run-through of battles and dates and kings and generals who went out into the world and shaped it as they saw fit, largely through violence.

When women enter into this narrative it is usually because they emulated masculine ideals (say, Joan of Arc wearing armour and encouraging men on the battlefield); broke the rules for what acceptable women did and were therefore made an example of (again, Joan of Arc); or because they lived up to the impossible standards set for women and were useful talismans of feminine virtue (see, again, Joan of Arc – you get the picture).

That women were often ignored in the historical record is a matter of social design. In the European context, from Aristotle to Aquinas, women had long been defined as inferior to men and it was believed that society should be organised to reflect this. To come to the attention of scholars and scribes, and enter the historical record, women thus had to break through a narrative that wanted them as quiet helpmeets, and little more.

We too are complicit in this silence. A desire to prove women as worthy subjects for history sent those in the discipline looking for the outliers that could 'prove' that women were just as good as men, usually by acting like them. Thus, we see breathless commentary when Viking women are discovered buried in warrior garb, or we are reminded of Queen Elizabeth I's famous Tilbury speech, in which she told her troops that she had "the heart and stomach of a king".

The focus on the extraordinary occludes the vast majority of women from history. The complex interiorities of their fascinating, meaningful and consequential lives are subsumed into a quiet background hum that allows for men, and the occasional standout woman, to shine.

This is not to say that historical women weren't involved in the extraordinary. The craftswomen who set up silk-weaving guilds in Paris and London were top-of-the-line artisans, exercising money and power. Medieval queens like Eleanor of Aquitaine and Matilda of Tuscany went toe-to-toe with their masculine counterparts, and usually bested them. Literary luminaries like Hildegard of Bingen wrote themselves into history and changed natural philosophy forever.

However, history is more than the great and the powerful. To really see the women of the past we need to accept that history is more than disruption. The quiet, everyday work of making the world is as interesting and important as its violent unmaking. It is there that we can find women thriving and building society.

Women who were 'just' women are fascinating in their own right, largely because they have been ignored for so long that we have yet to learn anything about them. By focusing on women in history, we can begin to truly educate ourselves about the realities of the past, because they were the ones who truly made the world. That is worthy.

Women like Joan of Arc are usually only revered because they emulated masculine ideals, argues Dr Janega

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GET HOOKED

Learn more about medieval women with our pick of key resources

BOOKS

The Once and Future Sex: Going Medieval on Women's Roles in Society

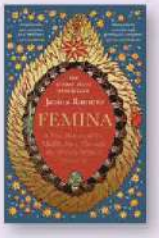
By Dr Eleanor Janega (WW Norton & Co, 2023)

In this vibrant, high-spirited history, Dr Eleanor Janega turns to the Middle Ages to unfurl its suppositions about women and reveal what's shifted over time – and what hasn't.

A Medieval Woman's Companion: Women's Lives in the European Middle Ages

By Prof Susan Signe Morrison (Oxbow Books, 2015)

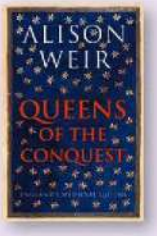
Comprising 20 short biographies, this book shines a light on the trailblazing medieval women who are now considered vital for understanding the era in a full and nuanced way.



Femina: A New History of the Middle Ages, Through the Women Written Out of It

By Dr Janina Ramirez (WH Allen, 2022)

Dr Janina Ramirez's groundbreaking reappraisal of medieval feminity looks at how women have been written out of history, and more importantly, why that matters for us today.



Queens of the Conquest: England's Medieval Queens

By Alison Weir (Jonathan Cape, 2017)

From Empress Matilda to Matilda of Flanders, Alison Weir strips away centuries of mythology to reveal the lives of England's queens in the decades after the Norman Conquest.

ON THE BBC

BBC RADIO 3

◀ Free Thinking: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe

bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001lkj3

Shahidha Bari (*left*) and guests explore influential medieval mystics Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe.

BBC RADIO 4

◀ In Our Time: Christine de Pizan

bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08sksb4

Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss Christine de Pizan who, according to Simone de Beauvoir, was the first woman to "take up her pen in defence of her sex".

BBC RADIO 4

◀ You're Dead to Me: Eleanor of Aquitaine

bbc.co.uk/programmes/p087r8kb

Greg Jenner is joined by historian Dr Gabby Storey and comedian Rachel Parris to take a look at the action-packed life of Eleanor of Aquitaine.

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Dr Eleanor Janega busts popular myths surrounding women in the Middle Ages. Listen at *bit.ly/3OYzZ4l*

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Professor Marion Turner introduces one of the most memorable and colourful figures of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: the Wife of Bath. Listen at *bit.ly/43x092D*

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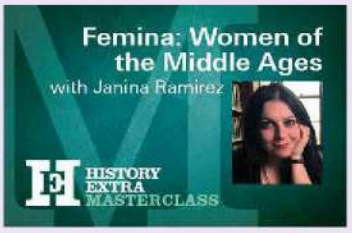

In this three-part series exclusively available to subscribers of *HistoryExtra*, Dr Janina Ramirez, a leading popular historian, offers a fresh look at the medieval world through the women usually written out of it. From political power-players to the overlooked figures who deserve to be better known, this masterclass series restores women to their rightful place in a fascinating era.

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BBC

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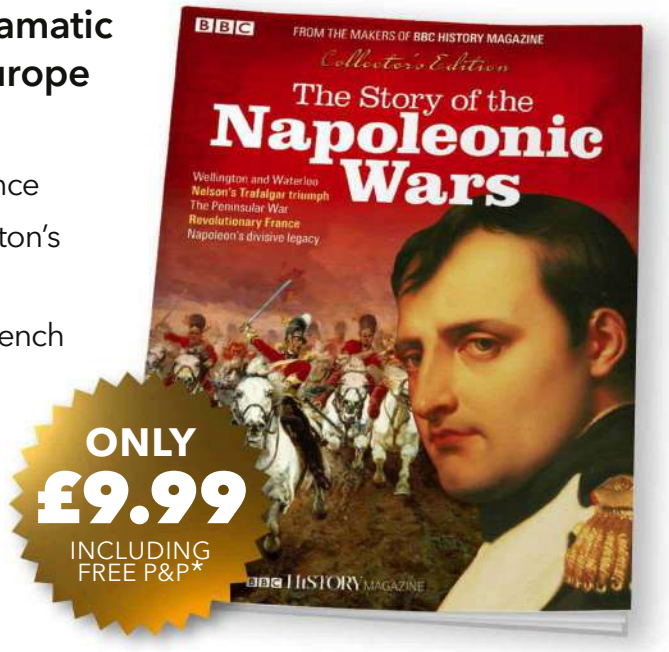

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CHANGING IDENTITIES

What happens when a spy becomes the subject of other people's investigations? **Nige Tassell** delves into the life of the Chevalier d'Éon – the French master of disguise who defied conventional notions of gender

ALAMY

After decades of speculation, gossip and even gambling on the matter, in 1810 it was an elderly Londoner called Mrs Cole who finally discovered the truth. For the previous 14 years, this widow had shared an apartment with a French spinster, the Chevalière d'Éon. During the last few of those years, the chevalière – the female equivalent of a chevalier, or knight – was largely bedbound. Both women were in their early eighties; both also lived in poverty and suffered poor health. Now, on 21 May 1810, at the age of 81, the Frenchwoman was dead.

Unsurprisingly, it was Mrs Cole who found the body. Mourning the passing of her friend and flatmate, she solemnly began to prepare the corpse to receive visitors, aiming to provide some dignity in death. As she changed the deceased's clothes, Mrs Cole made a startling revelation: the chevalière was very much in possession of male genitalia.

The French flatmate had told a convincing tale: that they had been born female but – due to social restrictions of the time – had been raised as a boy. As an adult, they had fought as a soldier, and had been free to revert to 'her' biological sex only after retiring from public life. Now it appeared that the opposite had been true. This was the final twist in an action-packed life.

Mrs Cole sought a second opinion – a dozen opinions, actually, including those of surgeons and professors of anatomy who visited the property. Yes, her friend had narrow, feminine hips and an unobtrusive Adam's apple, but all of these experts came to the same conclusion: that the chevalière had actually been a chevalier all along.

THE KING'S SECRET

Charles-Genèvieve-Louis-Auguste-André-Timothée d'Éon de Beaumont had been born in 1728 in the small Burgundy town of Tonnerre. His was a noble family, albeit a comparatively poor one. After a childhood of little note, he followed his attorney father into legal training, graduating in both civil law and canon law in Paris before taking on positions within the civil service. By the age of 30, he had risen sufficiently through the ranks to become a royal censor for history and literature.

By then, though, d'Éon had already embarked on the first of his double lives, having been recruited into *Le Secret du Roi* (The King's Secret), an undercover network of spies that, under the direct command of Louis XV, operated without the knowledge of the ministries of the French government. These spies often worked directly against government policy – at least, whenever opposing the official line worked in the king's favour.

An 18th-century mezzotint shows d'Éon wearing male garb. The Frenchman's androgynous looks enabled him to pass as a woman

LEFT: A 1748 portrait of King Louis XV. The monarch operated a spy network without the knowledge of the French government

BELOW: Louis XV is said to have sought d'Éon's assistance as part of a grand plan to install his cousin, the Prince of Conti, on the Polish throne

An early mission for d'Éon – albeit one that may have been, at the very least, exaggerated when he recounted it in his memoirs, as the episode was never documented elsewhere – involved travelling to Russia to elicit the support of the Empress Elizabeth. Support was sought for the placing of Louis XV's cousin, the Prince of Conti, onto the Polish throne. The empress was known for refusing to meet with French ambassadors so, in order to infiltrate the imperial court as well as evade the attention of the British who only permitted women and children across the Russian border, d'Éon took advantage of his comparatively androgynous looks to disguise himself as a fictitious French noblewoman, Lia de Beaumont. The

GETTY IMAGES X2, ALAMY X2

ruse was successful, with his female persona apparently gaining the trust of the empress and allegedly serving as one of her maids of honour. At the same time, under his biological sex, d'Éon was employed as secretary to the French embassy in St Petersburg.

DISPATCHED TO LONDON

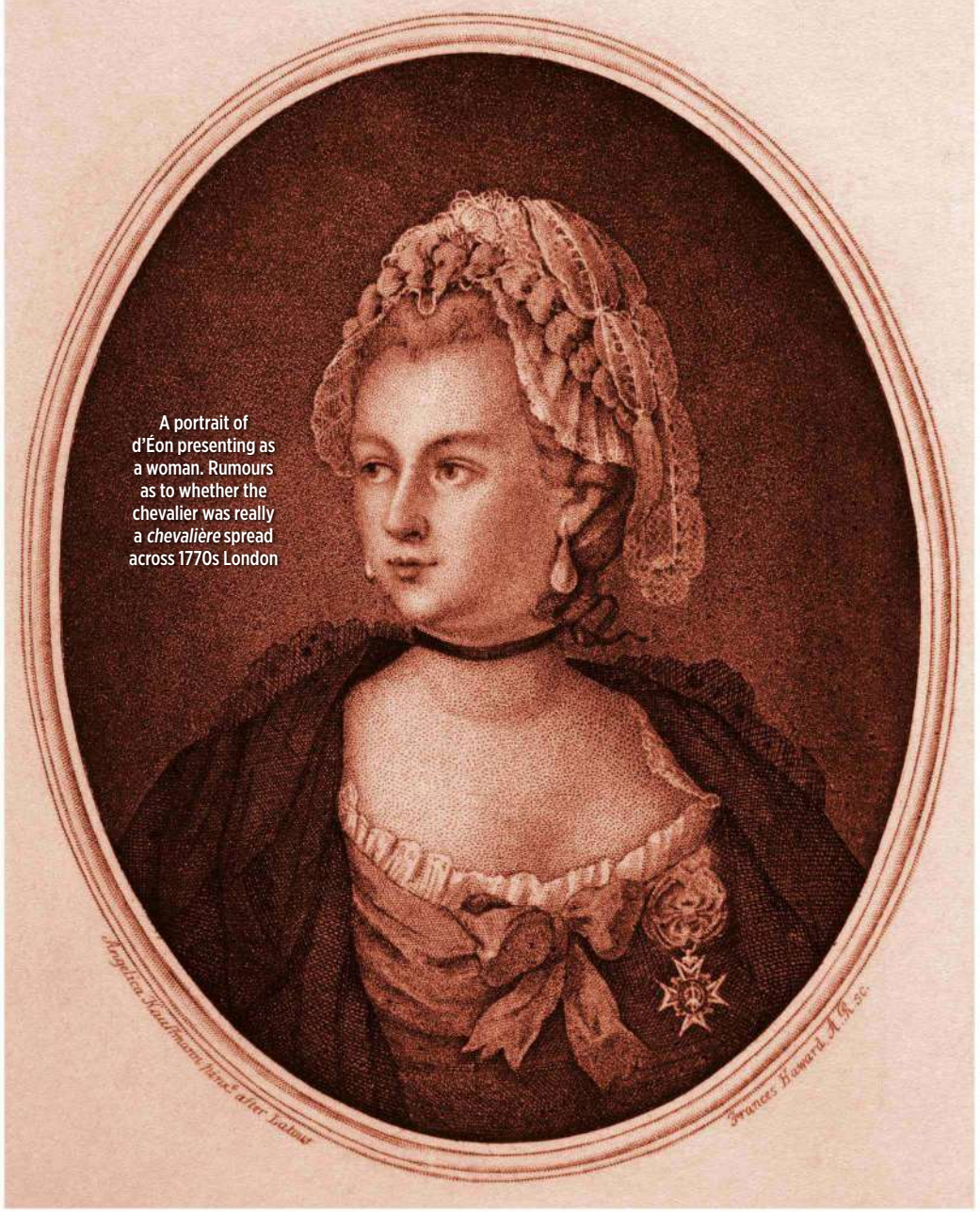
Returning to France in the autumn of 1760, d'Éon was appointed as a dragoon captain the following spring, seeing service for a portion of the remaining two years of the Seven Years' War. Having been wounded in battle, he was removed from the frontline and dispatched to London where his legal training would be put to good use: he was charged with helping to draft the peace treaty that would bring the war to a close. For his service in creating the conditions that would bring peace to Europe, d'Éon was awarded the Order of Saint Louis in 1763. The honour was the French equivalent of a knighthood and he could now use the title Chevalier d'Éon.

The new chevalier remained in London, becoming the embassy's chargé d'affaires before a promotion to the position of minister-plenipotentiary. Such appointments offered great opportunities to bolster his usefulness to Louis XV by supplying significant intelligence to the king. One example of this was overseeing covert surveys of the British coastline in preparation for Louis's misconceived plan of invading Britain, a scheme that only a small number of the king's very closest associates were aware of.

The privileges that came with being interim ambassador didn't last. Within three months, a permanent ambassador, the Comte de Guerchy, was appointed and d'Éon's role reduced to that of secretary. He didn't take this demotion lightly. Having been instructed to return to Paris for his protestations (and fearing the Bastille to be his destination once back on home ground), he resisted orders, instead writing directly to the king to accuse Guerchy of attempting to poison him at an ambassadorial dinner. The French government's request to have him deported fell on deaf British ears.

D'Éon retaliated to the French government's threats by publishing a swathe of secret correspondence from missions as part of *Le Secret du Roi*, causing Paris to retreat somewhat from its aggressive actions towards the chevalier. They now realised he was a politically dangerous man. D'Éon was a sharp thinker and, by not publishing the correspondence concerning Louis XV's secret and undeniably controversial invasion plans, he knew the king could not lend his support to the government's attempts to discipline d'Éon.

After Guerchy sued d'Éon for libel, the chevalier went into hiding in London where he became something of a folk hero to the British public who enjoyed the French government being undermined by one of their own. He remained a spy in Britain where, with the invasion correspondence as his personal insurance policy, he continued to receive a handsome annuity from Louis XV.



A portrait of d'Éon presenting as a woman. Rumours as to whether the chevalier was really a *chevalière* spread across 1770s London

"Such was the fervour over the chevalier's biology that a betting pool was even launched on the matter"

SALACIOUS RUMOURS

In London, the chevalier's androgynous looks meant that rumours abounded about his sex, with many observers holding the opinion that d'Éon was actually a woman masquerading as a man. Indeed, such was the fervour over the chevalier's biology that a betting pool was even launched on the very matter on no less an institution than the London Stock Exchange. No pay-outs were forthcoming though as d'Éon refused to be medically examined to provide a definitive answer. One school of thought would later suggest that the chevalier declined to settle the argument because, to help pay off mounting debts from an extravagant lifestyle, he was in receipt of payments from betting houses keen to keep the book open.

The mystery surrounding the chevalier remained, although one French nobleman viewed the interminable chatter about d'Éon's sex as sufficient confirmation in itself that the chevalier was actually a chevalière. "All the world says it," he announced. "Final incontestable proof!"

WHY DID THE CHEVALIER PRESENT AS A WOMAN?

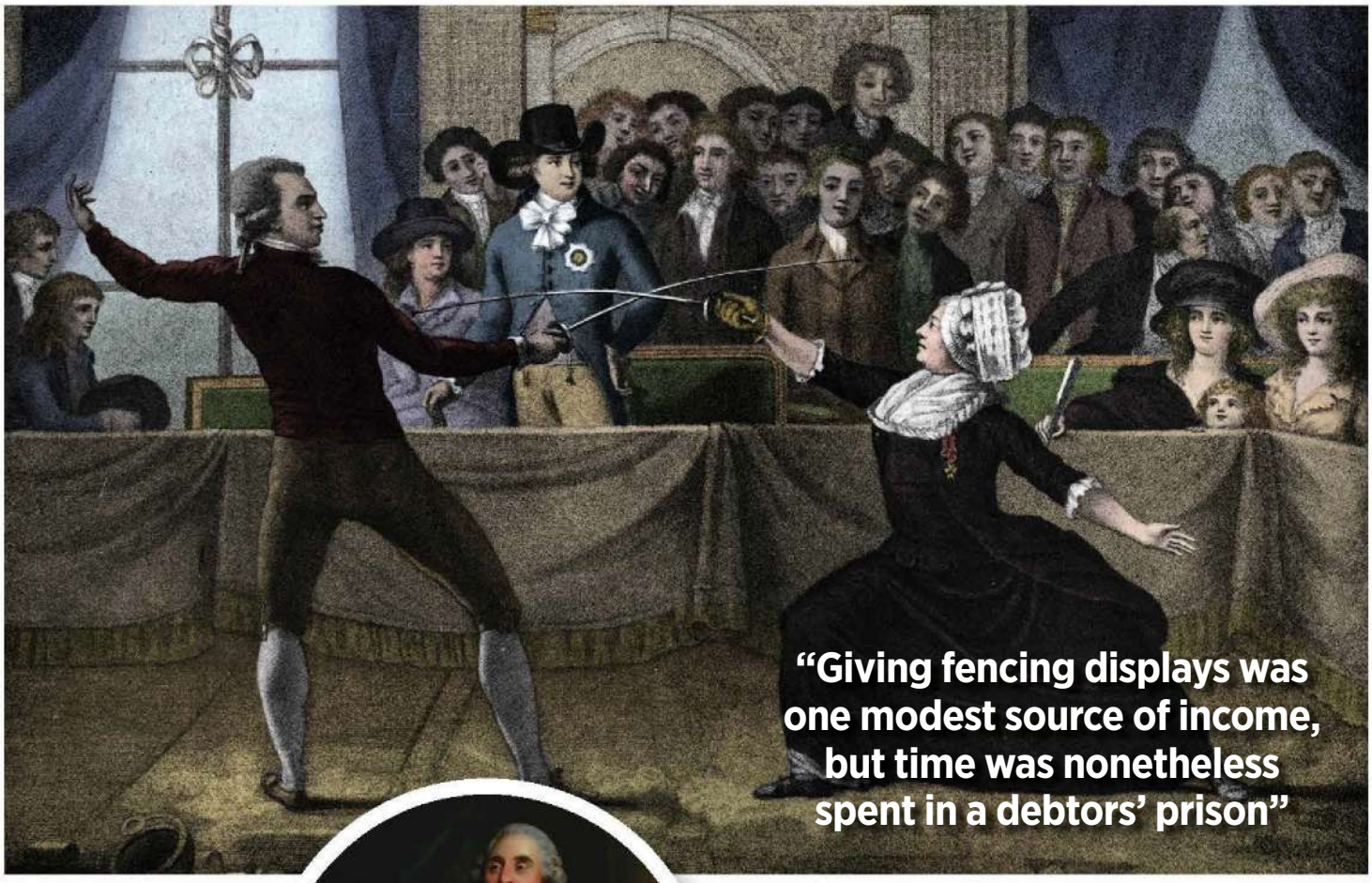
There were likely a multitude of reasons behind the spy's identity switch

In 1777, the Chevalier d'Éon returned to France from exile in London but only on the condition that the claim of being born female was recognised by the French government and crown, despite it eventually being revealed not to be true. In his book *Monsieur d'Éon is a Woman*, d'Éon's biographer Gary Kates offers several reasons for the double life.

"D'Éon's switch was not a compulsion but an intellectual decision that he made between 1766 and 1776 after careful thought and reading," says Kates, suggesting that d'Éon chose to present as a woman "because he deeply admired the moral character of women and wanted to live as one." Also, despite his military combat, d'Éon was ill at ease with hypermasculine ideals. Informed by the Enlightenment thinkers, he was "heavily influenced by early modern feminist writing that called into question patriarchal gender roles".

Kates argues that d'Éon's declining influence on public life may have been a contributing factor, too. "The 'cause' of d'Éon's transformation was his alienation from French political life. His career as a diplomat and spy having reached a dead end, he searched for a way to win back his honour and regenerate his own soul."

A satirical engraving of d'Éon from the 1770s. According to historian Gary Kates, the spy "deeply admired the moral character of women and wanted to live as one"



"Giving fencing displays was one modest source of income, but time was nonetheless spent in a debtors' prison"

TOP: **The newly titled Chevalière d'Éon took part in fencing matches to earn money – but it did not prevent the former spook from falling into poverty**

ABOVE: **Louis XVI provided d'Éon with a clothing budget as part of a covert pension deal dubbed 'The Transaction'**

In 1774, Louis XV died – and with him went *Le Secret du Roi*. No longer operating along these secret channels, and concerned about a possible loss of that annuity underwritten by the late king, d'Éon sought to end his exile in London and return to France. An agreement was drawn up: the chevalier could return to his homeland, and he could retain his pension, if he surrendered all the correspondence involving *Le Secret du Roi*.

But d'Éon insisted on another condition. Claiming to have been born female, the chevalier requested that the French authorities and the new king Louis XVI officially recognise this. D'Éon's story involved being raised as a boy because his father could only receive an inheritance from his wife's family if he fathered a son. The new king agreed to d'Éon's request, although insisted that the chevalier must always present as a woman. Louis XVI even provided d'Éon with a clothing budget. The deal was known as 'The Transaction'.

In his book *Monsieur d'Éon is a Woman*, d'Éon's biographer Gary Kates describes the journey back to France as one seen to be loaded with symbolism.

"It marked as well his maiden voyage across the gender boundary, a barrier much better defended and more impenetrable than any national border. As far as the world knew, d'Éon was returning both to his original country and to his original sex." Not everyone was convinced by these claims of being born female. In November 1777, the newly retitled Chevalière d'Éon was – after four hours of preparation – presented at court at Versailles, with one female observer announcing: "She had nothing of our sex but the petticoats and the curls which suited her horribly."

When France began to assist the anti-British rebels in the American Revolutionary War, d'Éon requested to join the cause, but was rebuffed by the French government. Further requests ended in arrest and being held in a dungeon for three weeks, before being sent back to Tonnerre, to which d'Éon was confined. Here, a collection of – possibly amplified and embellished – memoirs was embarked upon. Eventually, in 1785, small-town life proved too stifling and the chevalière successfully petitioned to be allowed to return to London.

These weren't to be happy years. The French Revolution had put paid to the pension previously authorised by successive kings and d'Éon fell on hard times. Family-owned land and property in Burgundy was also being seized by the revolutionary government, forcing d'Éon to sell personal possessions to make ends meet. Giving fencing displays was one source of modest income, but some time was nonetheless spent in a debtors' prison. A couple of years after release, d'Éon was paralysed by a fall and was largely confined to bed for those final years. It was a sad, rather tragic end to a life spent colourfully both in the uniform of a dragoon captain on the frontline of war and dressed to the nines for the collective gaze of the Versailles set.

Ever the secret-keeping spy, d'Éon had kept the personal mystery intact right up to death. But then, with the body still warm, Mrs Cole made her discovery.

GET HOOKED

READ

Christine Burns and Harry Cocks discuss the history of transgender rights in an article on the *HistoryExtra* website.

Read at *historyextra.com/transgender-history*

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HISTORY OF ART

WHAT GREAT PAINTINGS SAY

A timeless image of self-actualisation that reveals the power of art to create change

Embroidering the Earth's Mantle

by Remedios Varo, 1961

It is unusual to encounter a piece of art that feels both historical and modern, yet Surrealist artist Remedios Varo's 1961 work – the centre piece in a triptych of three thematically linked paintings – feels as if it could just as well step from the pages of a late-medieval manuscript as from a 20th-century work of science fiction.

The story it tells is equally enigmatic. In a tower perched high in the air, a secret rite appears to be taking place: six novitiates, dressed in identical blue robes, each with their own bolt of cloth, embroider intricate designs – trees, buildings, animals – into the fabric. A sinister, masked figure reads a book, stirring the cauldron from which snakes their magical thread. It is a scene of industrious fervour, of blind obedience, alchemy and mystery. But, look closer, and there is a story of self-actualisation and freedom to be told.

"*Embroidering the Earth's Mantle* was one of the first works of Varo's that I ever encountered, and I remember the feeling of curiosity I had about the story being told, and how it relates to the painting's own creation," says Caitlin Haskell, Gary C and Frances Comer curator in modern and contemporary art at the Art Institute of Chicago. "As with so many of Varo's works, it's a painting about Creation, and there is also a creative act being depicted *inside* the work, which seems to affect what we're seeing on several levels – the content of the painting, as well as its surface and facture.

"The first scene of the triptych [*opposite page, top left*] depicts a Mother Superior figure riding something like a bicycle, followed by a group of blue-robed novitiates, also on bicycles, staring ahead as if hypnotised. All except one, who looks out to the viewer. In this, the second of the three works, we meet the same group of women; this time we see them embroidering miniature scenes which, as they cascade Rapunzel-like from the tower, grow in size and scale below them.

"Look closer, though, and you will see that one of the women cuts her eyes away from her cloth, signalling that she has broken free of the hypnosis. She is plotting her escape from cloistered life, literally embroidering her way out of the tower."

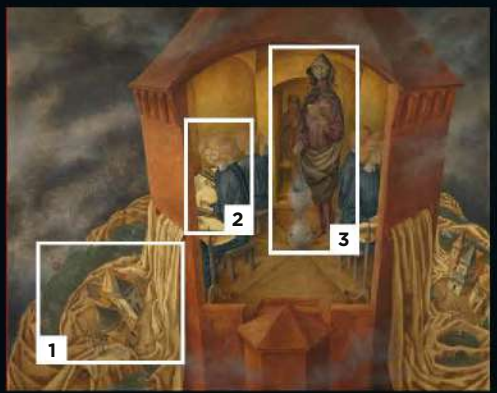
On the bolt of cloth in front of her, the self-actualising young girl is secretly embroidering two figures, one dressed in brown and one in blue. Further down the flowing fabric, tumbling down the tower into actuality, we see the two figures again. In the third and final scene of the triptych (*opposite page, top right*), the woman and her brown-clad lover are depicted sailing into a golden mist together, leaving the tower behind them.

"It's a fascinatingly complex composition," says Haskell. "As a work of the 1960s, we can read it both as a demonstration of the power of the creative act and also as a feminist image. Varo shows us how creative processes, like her own work as a painter, can change the world we live in by self-consciously working against the confining aspects of culture."

WORDS: CHARLOTTE HODGMAN

GET HOOKED

All three paintings in the triptych, including *Embroidering the Earth's Mantel*, will be on show in the Remedios Varo: Science Fictions exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago from 29 July –27 November 2023. For more information, visit *artic.edu*



1. MINIATURE SCENES

As buildings and figures grow to scale, we can make out a ship, a white ram, a shadowy figure leaning against a house, and – on the far right of the box – an embroidered image of the two lovers.

2. ESCAPE

As the women around her obediently embroider what they have been instructed, the young woman creates another image of escape for herself.

3. FIGURES

The two genderless figures oversee the women's work as they carry out a secret ritual.

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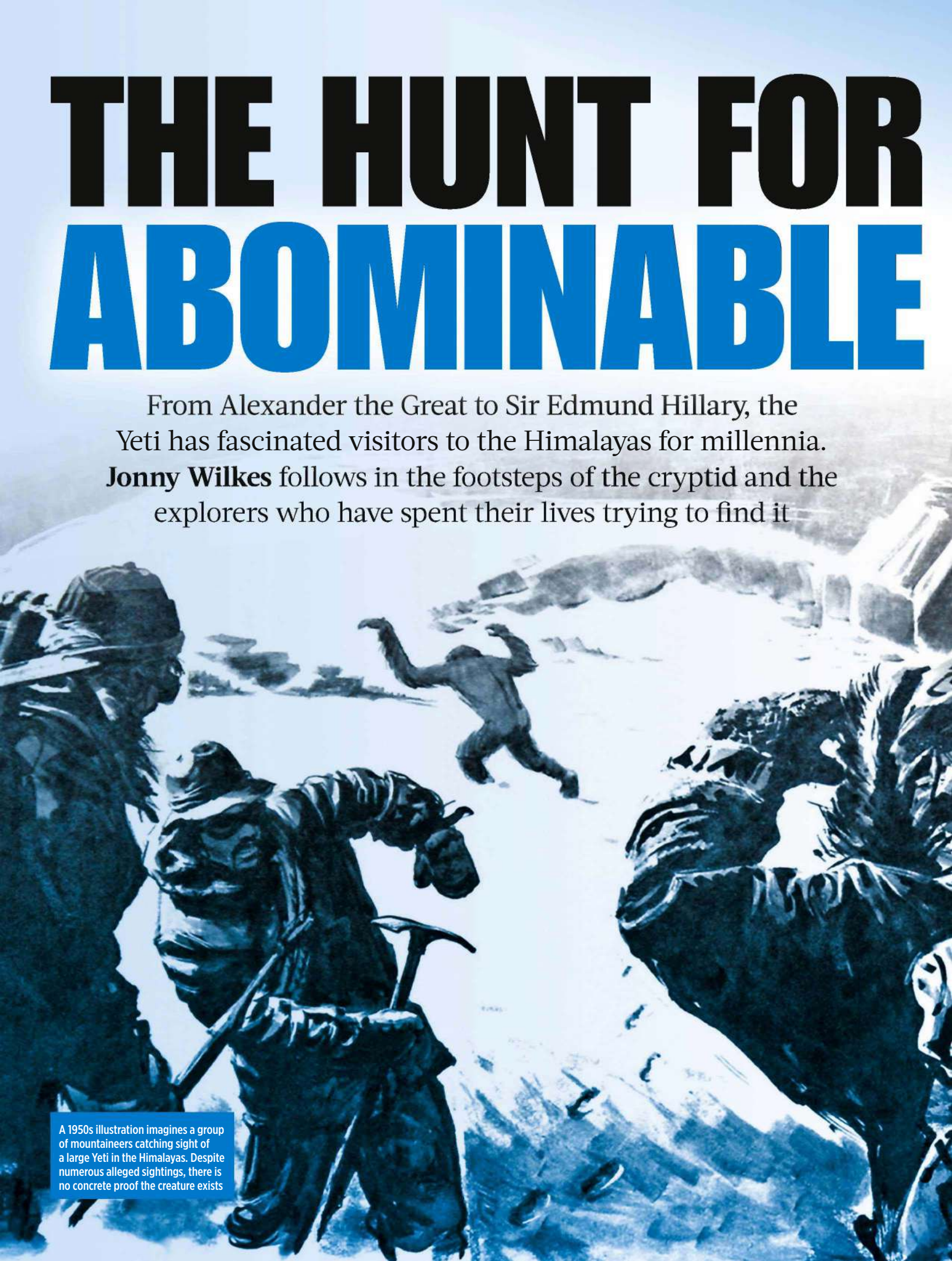
THE HUNT FOR ABOMINABLE

From Alexander the Great to Sir Edmund Hillary, the Yeti has fascinated visitors to the Himalayas for millennia. **Jonny Wilkes** follows in the footsteps of the cryptid and the explorers who have spent their lives trying to find it

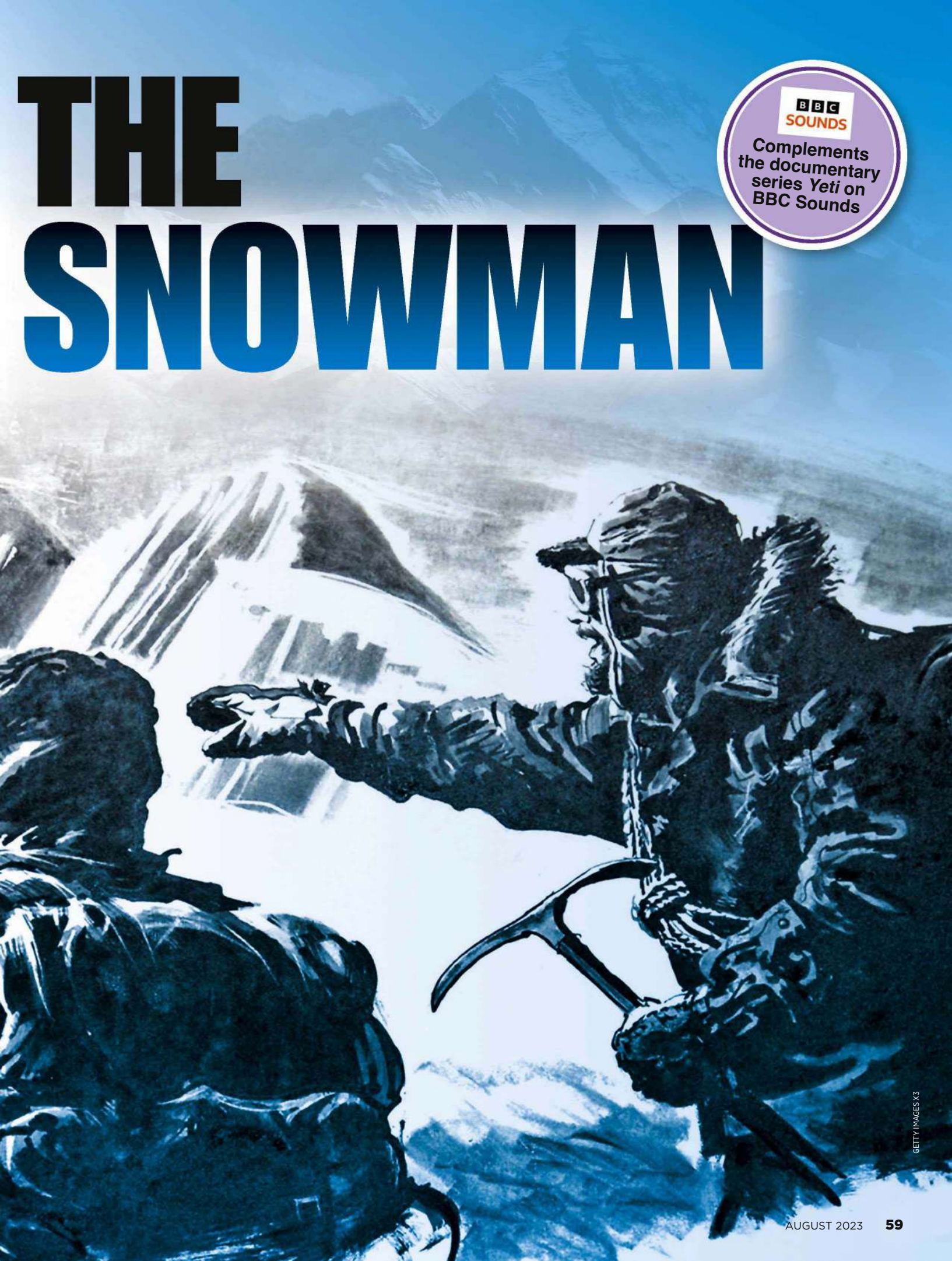


A 1950s illustration imagines a group of mountaineers catching sight of a large Yeti in the Himalayas. Despite numerous alleged sightings, there is no concrete proof the creature exists

THE SNOWMAN

BBC SOUNDS

Complements the documentary series *Yeti* on BBC Sounds



GETTY IMAGES X3

The 1921 British Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition set out from India to find a route to, and hopefully up, the world's highest mountain, but on their return the team had more to report than the successes of their recce. Interviewed by journalist Henry Newman, they spoke of coming across large footprints in the snow. Expedition leader Charles Howard-Bury concluded that they had been made by the loping of a wolf; local guides and porters, however, said they belonged to the legendary *metoh-kangmi*, roughly translating as 'man-bear snowman'.

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

An intrigued Newman spoke to some of the Tibetans who saw the humanesque footprints, and stories emerged of a mysterious, wild creature stomping across the Himalayas. Now fascinated, he needed an eye-catching name for the newspapers, since his mistranslation of *metoh* meant he thought it was called 'filthy snowman'. He came up with something far more evocative: the abominable snowman.

And so the legend of the Yeti – its Tibetan name – went global, capturing imaginations and inspiring a century, and counting, of cryptozoological studies, searches and sightings. The hairy, ape-like biped has come in all different shapes and sizes, sometimes said to be much taller than a human and sometimes small yet frightfully strong, and while most famously depicted with white hair to blend into the snow-covered landscape it can also be reddish-brown and live in the Himalayan forests around the mountains. In movies, meanwhile, the Yeti has been both the killer monster of the 1957 Hammer horror *The Abominable Snowman*, and the cuddly cave-dweller of *Monsters, Inc.* (2001).

Still, when it comes to evidence for the Yeti's existence, the closest that anyone's got has been footprints – although not the ones spotted by Howard-Bury and his team. During another British expedition reconnoitring routes up Everest 30 years later, in 1951, climbers Eric Shipton and Michael Ward saw bizarre tracks that ran for about a mile at an elevation of well over 15,000ft. They had signs of claw marks, too. Shipton took a number of photos, with each footprint almost twice as wide as a human's and larger than the ice axe and boot laid next to them.

These 'Shipton prints' became icons of the 20th-century fascination with the Yeti, and marked a significant stride to make physical the creature of ancient folklore. Traditional tales in the Himalayan region referred to the Yeti as a glacier spirit that brought fortune to hunting parties, or as something akin to a 'boogeyman' to scare people from venturing too deeply into the mountains. Such a creation was far from unusual: today, the Yeti is part of a family of bipedal cryptids around the world, including Sasquatch in North America, Yowie in Australia, and Mapinguari in the Amazon.

A close-up of one of the strange footprints discovered by Eric Shipton and Michael Ward during their 1951 visit to the Himalayas

THE LEGEND EVOLVES

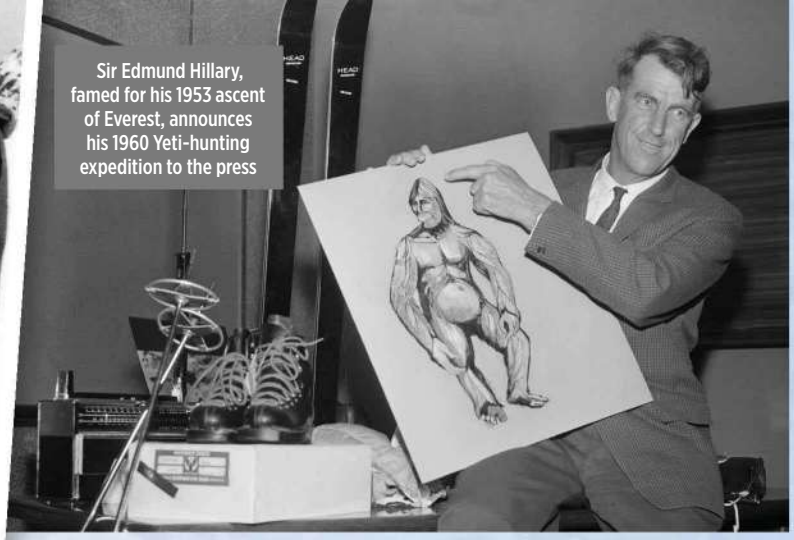
Yet the belief in the Yeti as a physical creature became established enough that when Alexander the Great stormed through the Indian subcontinent in 326 BC, he reportedly demanded to see one, only for the locals to refuse by claiming that it would not survive at low altitudes. Throughout the centuries, accounts continued until distinct types of Yeti had formed (the archetypal *Meh-teh*, smaller *Teh-Ima* and huge *Dzu-teh* or *Nyalm*) and the legend became part of Buddhist mythology as the religion spread across the region.

ABOVE: **Actors Robert Brown (*left*) and Forrest Tucker (*right*) with a dead Yeti prop in a still from 1957 film *The Abominable Snowman***

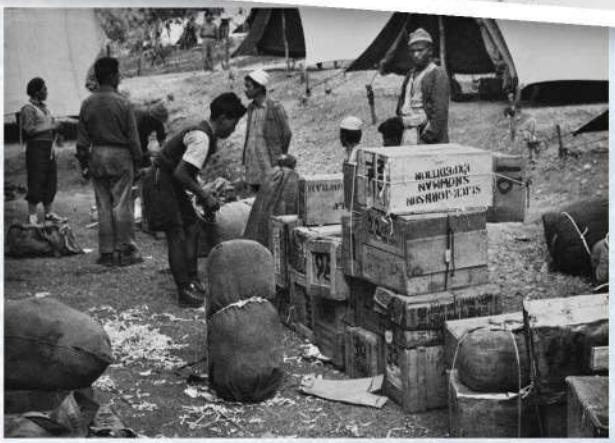
LEFT: **A rather more cuddly depiction of a Himalayan cryptid appears in the 2001 Pixar blockbuster *Monsters, Inc.***

RIGHT: **The legend of the Yeti spans many generations; this Tibetan mural of a Yeti dates back to the 19th century**

GETTY IMAGES X5, ALAMY X4



Sir Edmund Hillary, famed for his 1953 ascent of Everest, announces his 1960 Yeti-hunting expedition to the press



The hand and scalp of a 'Yeti' on display in Pangboche, Nepal. Testing has shown the body parts belonged to a human and a serow (a goat-like animal) respectively

TOP: **Another snap taken during Ward and Shipton's expedition shows a longer set of 'Yeti' tracks in the snow**

ABOVE: **Supplies are prepared ahead of a 1958 effort to hunt the Yeti, organised by US oil baron and cryptid fanatic Tom Slick**

The Yeti remained mostly undisturbed – in fact, many local beliefs stated it would be an ill omen to see one – until the 20th century, which turned out to be a fertile time for cryptozoology. Two decades after the journalist Henry Newman popularised the term 'abominable snowman' in 1921, two hikers claimed to have spotted "two black specks" moving across the Himalayan snow. Then Shipton's prints in 1951, helped by the conquest of Everest two years later, focused attention like never before on the region and the Yeti possibly hiding within.

BOUNTY HUNTERS

In 1959, the US embassy in Kathmandu went as far as issuing a memo to the State Department in Washington DC concerning the groups of Yeti-hunters flocking to the Himalayas. The 'Regulations Governing Mountain Climbing Expeditions in Nepal – Relating to Yeti' consisted of three rules for anyone wishing to mount a trip. The first stated that 5,000 rupees must be paid to the Nepalese government for a permit to search for the creature. The second regulation read, "In case 'Yeti' is traced it can be photographed or caught alive, but it must not be killed or shot at except in an emergency arising out of self defence." It went on to say that any photographs had to be surrendered to the authorities, while the third regulation ensured that any "news and reports throwing light on the actual existence of the creature" must similarly be handed over. As it remains to this day, Yeti tourism meant big business for Nepal.

"James Stewart hid the mummified finger in his wife's luggage, wrapped in her underwear"

While visitors struggled to make any progress, they kept a lookout for anything Yeti-related. In the late 1950s, an expedition funded by the appropriately named Texas oilman Tom Slick became aware of a curious item at a Buddhist monastery in the village of Pangboche: the mummified hand of a Yeti. The explorer Peter Byrne managed to acquire one of its fingers, allegedly after making a financial donation to the monastery, and smuggled it out of Nepal. He achieved this with the help of Hollywood star James Stewart, a friend of Slick's, who hid the finger in his wife's luggage, wrapped in her underwear.

In 1960, another Yeti body part showed up. Having seen strange tracks during his history-making climb of Everest with Tenzing Norgay, Sir Edmund Hillary went looking for the Yeti and came back with a supposed scalp borrowed from a monastery in Khumjung. Testing revealed, however, that the helmet-shaped hide came from a serow, an animal resembling a goat. As for the Pangboche hand, DNA analysis carried out in 2011 proved once and for all that it was human.

All those footprints seen by climbers could also be explained, it seemed. Individual imprints could have been of falling stones that became distorted when the snow melted, while tracks were possibly from a different animal, which created a larger, seemingly unexplainable print when the front and back paws landed in a similar spot. Michael Ward doubted a Yeti's involvement, instead suggesting the "abnormally shaped feet" of a person, since he had met Tibetans and Nepalese whose big toe "was at right angles to the rest of the foot". ▶

FANTASTIC BEASTS (AND WHERE TO FIND THEM)

The Yeti is not the only creepy cryptid to have spawned feverish searches, cruel hoaxes and outlandish conspiracy theories...

LOCH NESS MONSTER

SCOTLAND

▲ The traditional date for the first sighting is AD 565, when Saint Columba had an encounter with a lake monster. Was it an undiscovered marine serpent or a should-be-extinct plesiosaur? Either way, locals are happy to keep stories going as Nessie brings in thousands of tourists every year.

MONGOLIAN DEATH WORM

GOBI DESERT

▼ Known to Mongolians as *olgoi-khorkhoi*, this highly unusual killer is the subject of only a few potential sightings. Yet stories persist of a dark-red worm about three to five feet long that can deliver fatal electric shocks and shoot spit capable of corroding metal.

SASQUATCH

NORTH AMERICA

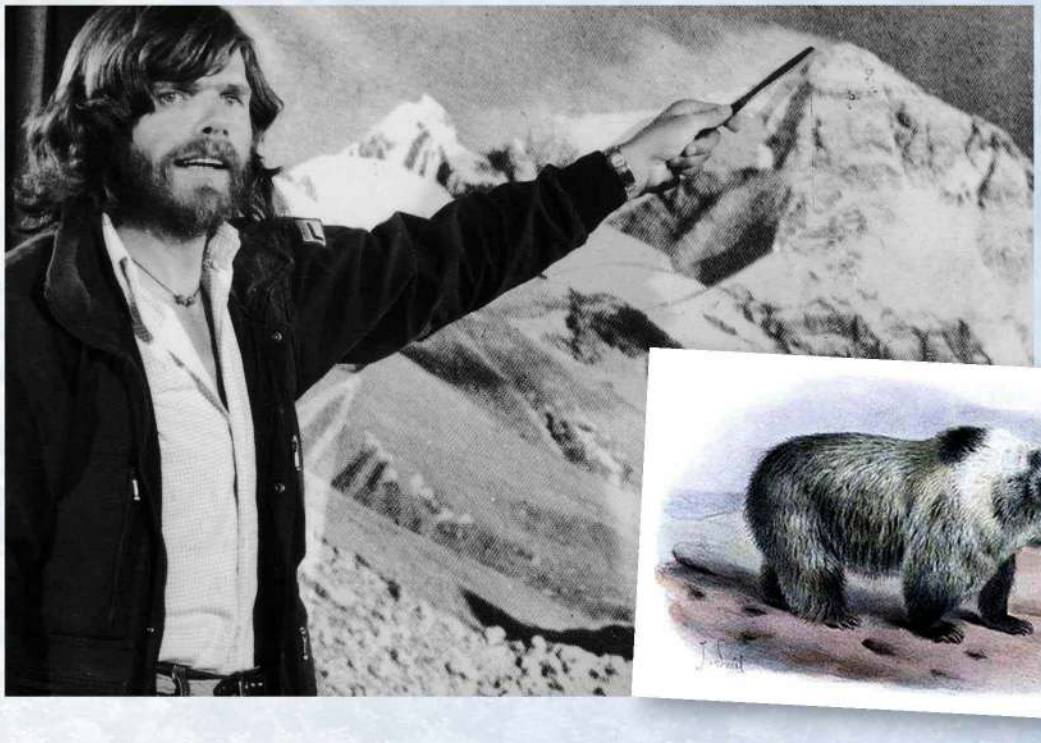
▲ Also known as Bigfoot, this large, hairy ape – a cousin of the Yeti – roams the forests of the Pacific Northwest. Since the 1950s, there have been thousands of sightings and footprints, the most famous being a short film of a walking Sasquatch in Bluff Creek, California, shot in 1967 by Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin.

CHUPACABRA

AMERICAS

▶ This violent vampire creature drains its prey of blood; its name means 'goat sucker'. Often described as reptilian with spines down its back or as a wild hairless dog, it only cropped up in the cryptid family in the late 1980s, when it was allegedly spotted by farmers in Puerto Rico.

GETTY IMAGES X5, ALAMY X4



LEFT: **Mountaineer Reinhold Messner claimed to have seen a Yeti in 1986**

CENTRE: **Messner later concluded that the beast might have been a Tibetan blue bear**

RIGHT: **US scholar Daniel C Taylor has argued that an Asiatic black bear may have created the Shipton prints of 1951**

◀ But what about actual sightings? In 1986, English physicist Anthony Wooldridge, who was on a charity run in the Himalayas, claimed to have seen a Yeti just 150 metres from him, and managed to take photos. The same year, the seasoned Italian mountaineer Reinhold Messner, famous for climbing Everest without supplemental oxygen, claimed he, too, had an encounter. He spent years trying to find another Yeti, unsuccessfully, while the conclusion of Wooldridge's story was that he had seen an unusually shaped outcropping of rock.

HOAXES AND HYPOTHESES

Equally questionable second-hand accounts of Yeti sightings have been commonplace, including the report by Ang Tsering Sherpa who said his father had seen one. "Yetis aren't so big. They are about the size of seven-year-old people. But Yetis are very strong," he said, before alluding to the magical powers that are sometimes part of the Yeti mythology. "If the Yeti had seen my father first, my father wouldn't have been able to walk. The Yeti can make people so they can't walk. Then he eats them."

All the scientific analysis and debunking of claims did little to extinguish the fascination with Yeti. In 2011, cryptozoological experts and enthusiasts held a conference in western Siberia and announced its "indisputable proof" of the Yeti's existence, such as the discovery of nests made from twisted tree branches. Shortly afterwards, though, one attendee, the American anthropologist Jeff Meldrum, revealed that the story had been faked by Russian authorities as a publicity stunt.

Cryptozoology has always been rife with hoaxes, motivated by fame and fortune. That's possibly what led hunters in China to go to the media in 2010 with claims of having captured a hairless, four-legged Yeti (actually a cat-like animal called a civet). But of all the cryptids, the Yeti has been the subject of a staggering amount of scientific research, which has resulted in major advances in the last decade.

In 2013, the University of Oxford geneticist Bryan Sykes made a worldwide appeal for any Yeti 'evidence' for analysis. From the dozens of samples he received, two hairs – one from northern India in the western Himalayas and the other from hundreds of miles away in Bhutan – matched a prehistoric polar bear, thought to have lived at least 40,000 years ago. Sykes presented the intriguing theory that the Yeti does exist, but as a bear hybrid.

"Two hairs matched a prehistoric polar bear thought to have lived at least 40,000 years ago"

In 2010, hunters in China's Sichuan province went to the media claiming to have captured a 'four-legged Yeti' – but it was actually just a hairless civet

If not a prehistoric anomaly, other rare breeds of bear could be the real-life Yeti. Reinhold Messner concluded in the 1980s that it might be either the Tibetan blue bear or Himalayan brown bear. In 2017, the American scholar, conservationist and leading figure in the study of the Yeti, Daniel C Taylor, who had spent decades on the hunt for the creature, finally published his extensive findings, among them a comprehensive analysis of the Shipton prints. In *Yeti: The Ecology of a Mystery*, he named the Asiatic black bear as the most likely contender.

Such findings are unlikely to convince everyone. It has been over a century of excitement and speculation for the abominable snowman; a century of footprints, stories, sightings and samples, coinciding with a century of wider interest in other unproven beasts like the Loch Ness Monster and Bigfoot. To many believers, the existence of the Yeti represents the wondrous unknowns of Earth, and that won't be broken simply by a lack of definitive proof.

GET HOOKED

LISTEN

A 10-part documentary series about the legacy of the Yeti in the Himalayas, *Yeti*, is now available to stream on BBC Sounds, with episodes also due to be broadcast weekly on BBC Radio 4. For details of other historical TV and radio programmes, scan the QR code above or visit *historyextra.com/tvradio*

WHAT IF...

THE CONTINENTAL ARMY HAD NOT ESCAPED AFTER THE BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND?

Nige Tassell and **Professor Benjamin Carp** consider the fate of the American colonies had George Washington not ordered his troops to retreat from the battlefield in August 1776

Three clear choices faced George Washington in late August 1776. As commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, he had just lost to the British at the battle of Long Island, the latest major skirmish in the American Revolutionary War.

Washington could have carried on fighting, but this would have been a woefully misguided decision bearing in mind the superiority of the British, both in terms of personnel numbers and strategic strongholds around the New York archipelago. He could have surrendered along with his Patriot troops, but this would have meant the war was effectively over – and a dent would have been made in any long-term struggle for independence.

Washington's only realistic option – in order to preserve his men and live to fight another day – was to order a mass retreat, a large-scale escape under the cover of darkness. While this retreat gifted the crucial territory to the British, it meant the war would continue – as it did until the Patriots took ultimate victory seven years later.

Had Washington surrendered after Long Island, the momentum from the Patriot side, following the glow of victory at the Siege of Boston, would have been extinguished. So says Benjamin Carp, the Daniel M Lyons professor of American history at Brooklyn College and the author of several books, including *The Great New York Fire of 1776: A Lost Story of the American Revolution* (Yale, 2023).

IN CONTEXT

By late August 1776, the American Revolutionary War had been raging for 16 months. Having successfully defended Boston against the British, George Washington's Continental Army sought to do similar at the Port of New York. However, Washington's troops were outnumbered at the battle of Long Island and he suffered the loss of around a fifth of his men. But rather than fight on or surrender, the Continental Army escaped overnight, much to the British command's surprise. While the port was ceded to the Loyalists, the Patriots regrouped and finally won independence seven years later, changing the face of North America forever.

The evacuation of the last remaining British troops in 1783 was marked with a triumphant procession through New York City, led by George Washington

GETTY IMAGES X3

"Had Washington surrendered, along with the bulk of his army, at Long Island, it would have dealt a serious blow to Continental Army morale. It is impossible to know whether another commander-in-chief might have been able to rise up in his place, command the respect of the remaining troops, recruit new soldiers, and stand against the British Army."

Surrender is likely to have resulted in the puncturing of the independence movement. Professor Carp suggests, in that scenario, "perhaps many American Patriots might have taken an offer of pardon and agreed to negotiate away independence". Certainly, surrender wouldn't have impressed the French, whose support for the Patriot cause ended up being incredibly important to its eventual victory.

BRITISH NEGOTIATIONS

"Washington's ability to remain in the field with his army was crucial for garnering support. The French had other reasons to support the Americans, of course – the ability to destabilise Britain and prevent it from becoming too predominant made the alliance with the American rebels quite tempting. But the French closely watched the rebellion for signs that it could sustain its resistance against Britain."

If a surrender was likely to bring about the end of the war, would it have doused the fervour for independence? "It probably would have dealt a blow to the more aggressive factions of the Continental Congress," reasons Professor Carp. "Perhaps a more moderate faction might have seized control of Congress and urged renewed negotiations with the British." But what about the prospect of another war for independence further down the line?

"This is very difficult to know. The American colonists were clearly anxious to have a free hand in their commercial dealings and in their ability to settle the trans-Appalachian

ABOVE: **A modern painting of the battle depicts men of the Delaware Regiment opening fire at their British opponents**

TOP RIGHT: **Another image shows George Washington and his men escaping across the East River into Manhattan**

west at the expense of the indigenous inhabitants. The Patriot leaders had already demonstrated that they could mobilise the colonists' grievances into widespread resistance. As to how quickly the Americans might have mobilised for another revolt would have depended in part on whether they could raise enough money, arms, gunpowder etc from Europeans.

"It is possible, instead, that the Thirteen Colonies might have left the British empire peacefully with diplomatic and commercial arrangements that both the Americans and the British would have found mutually beneficial."

Whether through peaceful concessions or military victory, Professor Carp can't envisage a scenario whereby some vestige of British rule remained to this day. "I just can't. Just as Canada eventually left the British empire, the American colonies would have eventually done so, too."

If independence was almost inevitable, the advent of a sharply defined constitutional democracy, such as that which would form the bedrock of the newly minted United States, wasn't. "American independence of some kind would have happened regardless, but I don't know that a republic would have been inevitable. It's possible that Britain might have established some sort of hereditary aristocracy in the British colonies."

"THE LEADERS DEMONSTRATED THAT THEY COULD MOBILISE THE COLONISTS' GRIEVANCES INTO WIDESPREAD RESISTANCE"

A DIFFERENT PATH

Without Washington's victory, the distinct branches of American government, with those famous interlocking checks and balances maintaining a healthy democracy, might never have been authored – and thus wouldn't have influenced the French Revolution and all that came in its wake. "It's possible that," concludes Professor Carp, "without George Washington, a strongman might have emerged in America who ruled in a more authoritarian fashion."

And who knows the effect of such a figure, and his possibly equally authoritarian successors, on the development of American society. Washington's fateful retreat in 1776 proved healthy for democracy.

DID YOU KNOW?

JABBING FOR VICTORY

During his time in charge of the Continental Army, George Washington was faced with two main enemies – the British and smallpox. In 1777, he made the decision to have the entire army inoculated, saving many hundreds of lives.

GET HOOKED

LISTEN

Professor Benjamin Carp answers questions about the American Revolutionary War on the *HistoryExtra* podcast: *historyextra.com/revolutionary-war-qa*

NEXT MONTH

What if the Wehrmacht had not invaded Russia?

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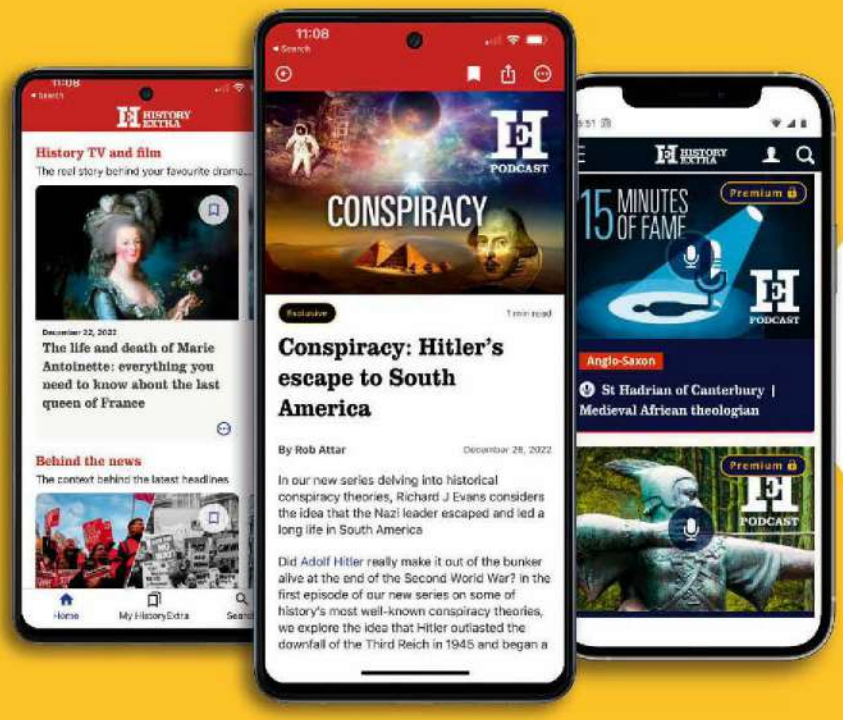
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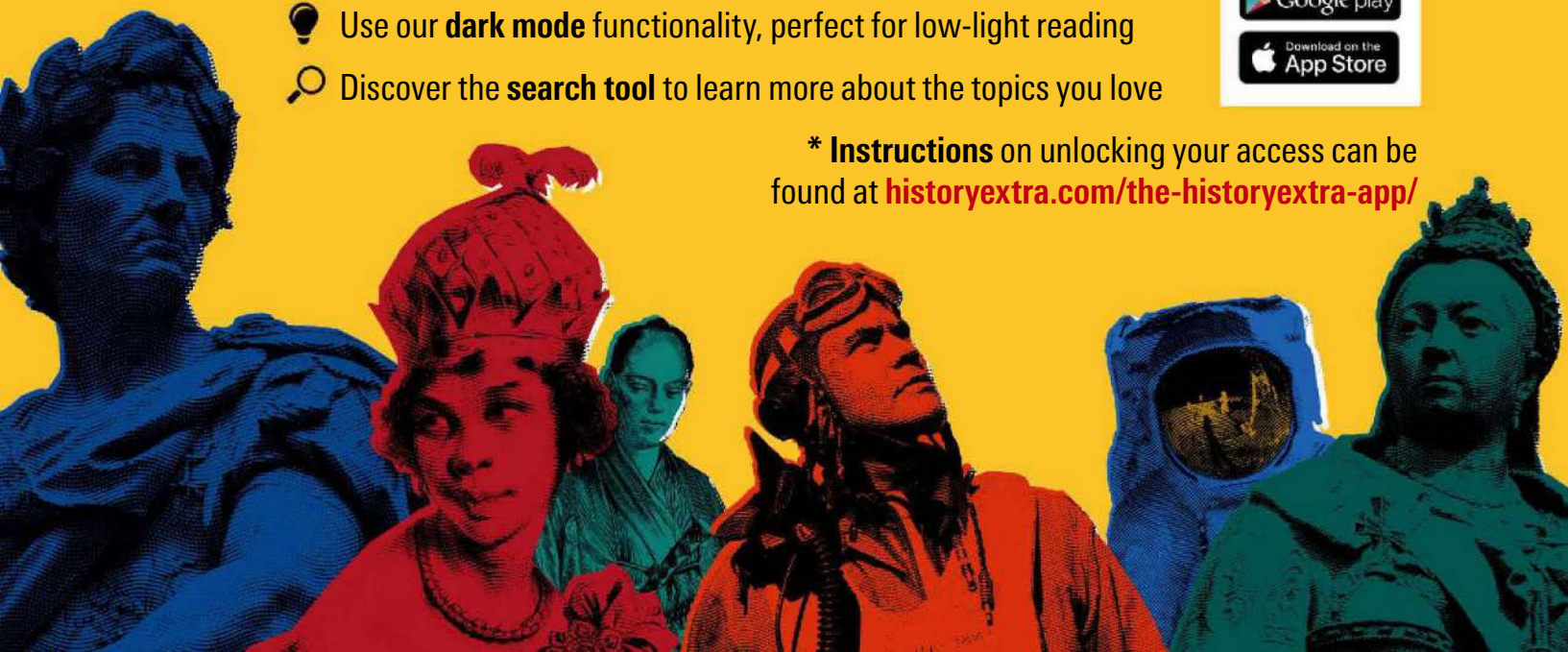


8,407

The number of silver coins in the Dunscore Hoard, mostly from the 13th and 14th centuries, found by metal detectorists in Scotland in 2022.

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS
Harriet Quimby in 1911, around the time she gained her pilot's licence

Who was the first woman to fly across the Channel?

SHORT ANSWER Harriet Quimby flew into the history books, but the newspapers of the day were somewhat preoccupied

LONG ANSWER Louis Bleriot earned the plaudits, and a £1,000 prize, as the first aeroplane pilot to fly across the Channel, but it would be a little under three years from his 1909 flight before a woman achieved the same feat. The Michigan-born Harriet Quimby had got used to picking up firsts – she had been the first American woman to receive a pilot's licence – so a Channel crossing was the next obvious challenge.

There were a few concerns: she had never flown long-distance over the sea or even used a compass before. What's more, when she took off at 5.35am on the morning of 16 April 1912, it was shaping up to be a foggy and windy day, and so cold that she wore several coats and sat with a hot water bottle on her lap. Yet Quimby made it from Dover to Hardelot, choosing to land on a beach so as not to ruin any farmer's field, in under an hour.

THE ST. LOUIS STAR WOMAN'S SECTION

AN AMERICAN GIRL THE FIRST TO FLY THE ENGLISH CHANNEL

Remarkable Photographs of Harriet Quimby's Trip by Aeroplane From England to France

HITTING THE HEADLINES
Few papers devoted much attention to Quimby's cross-Channel exploits – one exception was the *St Louis Star*, which published this illustrated feature

Sadly, her achievement garnered underwhelming press attention since newspapers were somewhat preoccupied: *Titanic* had sunk a night earlier. More sadly, like many who caught the aviation bug in its early days, Quimby was not destined for a long life. Just 11 weeks later, on 1 July, she lost control of her plane and fell from her cockpit to her death.

GETTY IMAGES X1, ALAMY X1

FIT FOR A... PRESIDENT
A view of the White House's southern façade, known for its semi-circular portico

Why is the White House white?

SHORT ANSWER Ignore any story about burning Brits – that whitewashes the real, more practical, reason

LONG ANSWER There is a persistent claim that the home of the US president was daubed with its famous colour to cover the burn marks from when British soldiers invaded Washington DC in 1814 and torched the town. It's a good story, but not a true one.

Records show that lime-based whitewash had covered the building since the construction phase to protect the sandstone from freezing, and people were referring to it by the nickname, the White House, long before the British were coming. That was catchier than the Executive Mansion and less ironic – given that the Americans had got rid of the monarchy in the Revolutionary War – than the President's Palace.

It wouldn't be the official name for the residence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, though, until 1901 and Theodore Roosevelt. He was also the one to build the famous West Wing, where the most important rooms are located.

154

The number of years between the outbreak of the War of 1812 and a protest against the conflict by the Procrastinators' Club of America in 1966.

How did William III die?

SHORT ANSWER While a Jacobite mole could be held accountable, this was no assassin

LONG ANSWER William III had come to the throne in 1689, having been invited by English nobles to come from his homeland in the Dutch Republic and replace the unpopular Catholic king James VII and II. That went so well that it became known as the Glorious Revolution. The other end of his reign, however, was nowhere near as glorious.

While out riding at Hampton Court, his horse Sorrel stumbled on a molehill and threw the king to the ground. He broke his collarbone, which led to complications, pneumonia and his death on 8 March 1702. This was not a cause for sadness for all, as supporters of the old regime, the Jacobites, began toasting the offending mole as "the little gentleman in the black velvet waistcoat".

THE FALL OF MAN
A statue of the king in St James's Square, London, depicts the molehill that caused his horse to stumble

STAYING SHARP
The sword is now on display in the city of Wuhan. Old Chinese characters revealing the name of its owner are still visible below the hilt (*inset*)

What is the Sword of Goujian?

SHORT ANSWER A still-sharp blade found underwater? Sounds like a real-life Chinese version of Excalibur

LONG ANSWER Once archaeological work began in 1965 on ancient tombs in Jingzhou, China, thousands of artefacts were excavated, but the water-damaged – if not underwater – sites meant expectations had to be, if you will, dampened. Then, inside a casket next to a well-soaked skeleton, was a wooden scabbard that had formed an airtight seal around the sword inside.

The blade was found to be all-but untarnished and still so sharp that it reportedly cut an archaeologist's finger. That's not bad, considering that, to date, the best guess is that it belonged to Goujian, ruler of Yue around 2,500 years ago. Double-edged, 55cm long and exquisitely decorated, its preservation can be explained, as well as the perfectly designed scabbard, by its unusual yet highly effective composition of copper, tin and sulphur, which prevents rust.

In fact, the greatest damage is a 7mm crack, picked up in 1994 while in Singapore. Since then, Chinese authorities haven't let the sword out of the country.

GETTY IMAGES X3, ALAMY X4

STEPPED IN HISTORY
A depiction of the Mongols' victory at Legnica in 1241. The empire continued to thrive after the death of Genghis Khan (*right*) – but it wasn't immortal

What stopped the Mongols in Europe?

SHORT ANSWER When fighting everyone they met wasn't enough, they fought the weather and themselves

LONG ANSWER Under Genghis Khan and his successors, the Mongols carved out one of the largest empires in history with China on one side and central Europe on the other. Their invasions of modern-day Poland and Hungary suggested they would never stop: in 1241, they won two great victories over European forces at Legnica and Mohi. Further south, they sacked Anatolia.

Then, with the continent for the taking, the Mongols retreated to their homeland on the steppes of Asia. While it hadn't helped that Ogodei Khan died in 1241, apparently forcing his men to return to Mongolia for the election of a new ruler, their advance hardly came to a screeching halt overnight; it took years and depended on many factors.

Among the problems the Mongols faced was that they stretched themselves too thin and against enemies who (sometimes) put their differences aside. Genghis Khan's descendants also had a bad habit of fighting among themselves. And according to scientific analysis of tree rings, even the weather may have been against them, as it appears the climate became wetter and colder than the nomadic Mongols liked. They headed south, reaching Baghdad, but were rebuffed by the Mamluks and, before they knew it, the empire was fractured.

DID YOU KNOW?

SHOT AT SUCCESS
Annie Oakley, the famed US sharpshooter, won at Wimbledon while in England in 1897. But the London district wasn't nearly as famous for tennis as it is today: Oakley's victory came in an annual rifle competition.

SCHNAPPS ELECTION
In June 1984, New Zealand PM Robert Muldoon shocked the nation by calling a snap election. Muldoon, who was visibly inebriated, would come to regret his announcement: his ruling National Party ended up losing.

DO AS I SAY...
Antoine Charles Louis de Lasalle, a French colonel in Napoleon's hussar regiment, once quipped: "Any hussar who isn't dead at age 30 is a layabout." Ironically, he lived to the age of 34, when he was killed at the battle of Wagram in 1809.

CENSORED CONQUEST
In 1885, 35 members of the Leek Embroidery Society, Staffordshire, made a full-size facsimile of the Bayeux Tapestry. They worked from 'censored' images, however, so the nude men from the original appear in underwear.

How old is the custom of 'pouring one out'?

SHORT ANSWER Add it to pyramids and mummification as ways the ancient Egyptians honoured their dead

LONG ANSWER The act of spilling a bit of drink on the floor to honour a fallen friend is seen in countless war movies and readily associated today with African-American hip-hop culture as 'pouring one out for your homies'. But under a different name, 'libations', the ritual has much older origins.

"Pour libation for your father and mother who rest in the valley of the dead," reads the ancient Egyptian Papyrus of Ani, "For as you do for your parents, your children will do for you also."

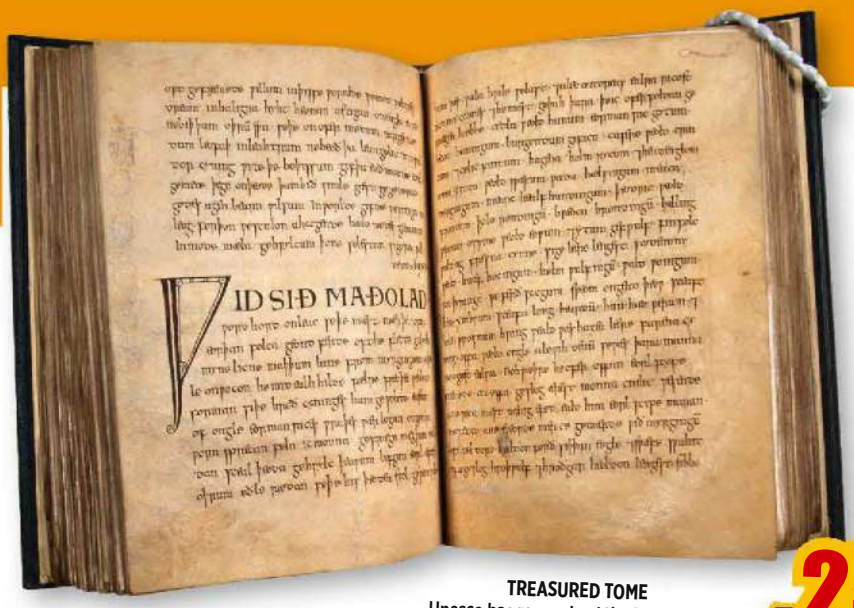
And this is just one of a wide gamut of similar rituals seen around the world, from Greek art to Burmese Buddhist ceremonies, intended for anything from pleasing the gods to asking for good harvests.

POUR DECISION
Spilling one's drink in honour of the dead has a surprisingly long provenance

How was phosphorus discovered?

SHORT ANSWER Alchemy really takes the piss... no, really

LONG ANSWER When Hamburg-based chemist Hennig Brand discovered phosphorus in 1669, he was trying to make an element... just not the one he ended up with. Committed to cracking the mystery of alchemy, or turning base materials into gold, he believed the answer was in urine. Lots of urine. He boiled down 1,200 gallons of the stuff, during which he isolated a waxy substance that glowed. Brand named it phosphorus, or 'light bearer'. While never helping him make gold, he kept his discovery a secret. Before long, the element would be made again by fellow German Johann Kunckel and Anglo-Irish chemist Robert Boyle.



TREASURED TOME
Unesco has recognised the book as one of Britain's primary cultural artefacts

What is written in the Exeter Book?

SHORT ANSWER Without this single book, Old English libraries would be even smaller

LONG ANSWER Our understanding of Anglo-Saxon literature almost completely relies on just four texts: the Junius Manuscript, Vercelli Book, Nowell Codex and Exeter Book. The latter is arguably the most important as the largest extant collection of Old English poetry, containing about a sixth of what survives alone.

Copied by a single scribe in c960–80 AD and ending up at Exeter Cathedral in the 11th century, it originally had 131 pages filled with both religious and secular writings, from saints' lives and elegiac verse, to heroic poems and 95 riddles. Among the contents is *The Seafarer*, a first-person account of a man alone at sea; *The Rhyming Poem*, so-called as it is unusually made up of rhyming couplets; and a mention of "middle earth" that went on to inspire JRR Tolkien.

Yet its undeniable historical importance has not prevented some egregious treatment from previous owners over the centuries, including using the Exeter Book as a coaster and a cutting board.

25

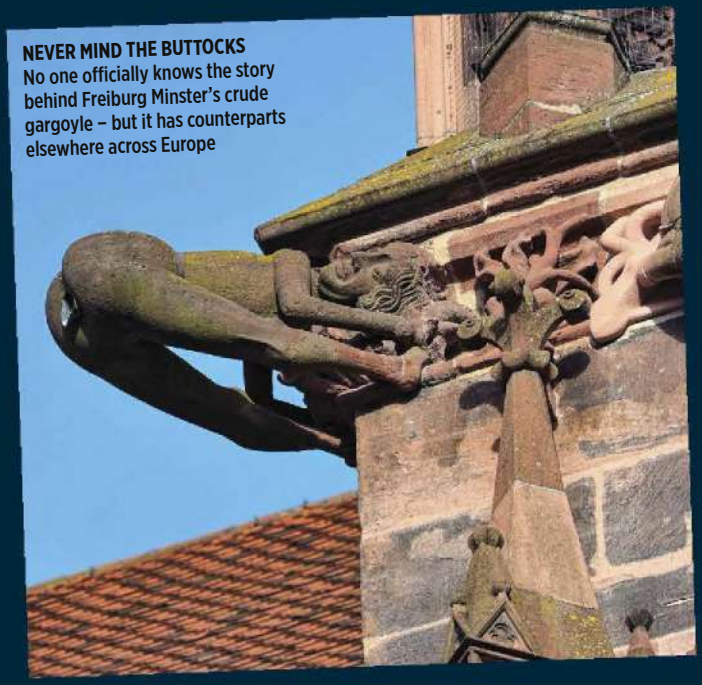
The total height, in feet, of the fabled Trojan Horse, according to best estimates. It would have also been 10 feet wide and eight feet long.

Why was limping a Victorian fad?

SHORT ANSWER One royal woman's physical condition is another woman's fashion must-have

LONG ANSWER In 1863, Alexandra of Denmark came to the attention of the British social scene with her marriage to the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII. Beautiful and dignified, she became what every favourite of the elite becomes: a fashion icon. Noblewomen spent vast sums copying her attire – and when rheumatic fever left her with a limp, they copied that too by feigning lameness. Shops sold shoes with one heel higher than the other to achieve the 'Alexandra Limp', while walking stick salesmen enjoyed a booming trade. Not everyone was sold, with one newspaper labelling it "idiotic", and fashion moved on quickly, to a tight-fitting skirt that didn't allow for limping.

THE DANISH GIRL
Alexandra was renowned for her unique style, which others sought to emulate



NEVER MIND THE BUTTOCKS
No one officially knows the story behind Freiburg Minster's crude gargoyle – but it has counterparts elsewhere across Europe

Why does Freiburg have a mooning gargoyle?

SHORT ANSWER That's one way to settle a payment dispute...

LONG ANSWER Visitors to the German city of Freiburg im Breisgau may spot a feature on its 13th-century cathedral not quite in keeping with the Gothic aesthetic. Look up and there's a gargoyle of a person bent in half and bearing their naked posterior outwards (with the drainage hole exactly where you'd imagine).

Legend has it that a stonemason had grown so angry at not being paid properly that he crafted the lewd addition and pointed it in the direction of the city council. That may just be a story, though, since mooning gargoyles can be seen on other churches, including in England: St Benedict's, Glinton, and All Saints in Easton-on-the-Hill. That raises the possibility of the design being a quirk of Gothic architecture, perhaps as a means of keeping the sinful pointing away from the goodness inside. Or it was just a way for masons to get through the working day.

GETTY IMAGES X6, ALAMY X2

GRIM AFTERMATH
Australian personnel pose alongside the wreckage of a Japanese plane shot down during the raid

Why did Japan bomb Australia in WWII?

SHORT ANSWER Pearl Harbor had been such a 'success' that the Japanese wanted to do it again

NEVER FORGOTTEN
A memorial on Darwin's Esplanade commemorates those who died

LONG ANSWER Japan's strike on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 brought the US into World War II and spread fears around the Pacific of escalating aggression, especially against Australia. As part of the British empire, Australians were already fighting in huge numbers and their northern shores held increasingly important strategic value for Allied air forces and navies.

Those fears were quickly justified: the imperial navy made the most of the element of surprise again by launching a bombing raid on Darwin on 19 February 1942 (just a few days after British-held Singapore had fallen). Since the Northern Territory town had seen a military build-up, it was a likely target; the evacuation of civilians had continued right up until the day before.

In all, 242 planes across two waves devastated the lightly defended Darwin with the dual intention of damaging as much Allied hardware as possible, including dozens of ships, and sending a clear warning to the country about Japanese firepower.

More than 230 people died in the attack, which the *Sydney Morning Herald* described as "a blitz of the most ferocious kind". Raids continued for the next 18 months, but none of them eclipsed Darwin, or 'Australia's Pearl Harbor'.

How long has Lourdes been a place of pilgrimage?

SHORT ANSWER In 1858, a young girl's Marian apparitions put the Lord in Lourdes

READY FOR SPRING TIME
The Massabielle grotto is visited by around 6 million pilgrims each year

LONG ANSWER The small town of Lourdes in southwestern France has been a key site in the Christian world for more than 150 years, drawing millions of people hoping to renew their faith and, maybe, receive a miracle. It began in February 1858 when a poor and sickly 14-year-old girl named Bernadette Soubirous had a vision of the Virgin Mary; the first of 18 at the Massabielle grotto by the River Gave de Pau. During one, she unearthed a spring that is said to have miraculous healing properties. Within a couple of years, the pilgrims started appearing and they've barely stopped since.

Was there a plan to nuke the Moon?

SHORT ANSWER A Cold War inferiority complex saw the Americans try to redefine the phrase 'shooting the Moon'

LONG ANSWER By 1958, the Soviets had taken a lead in the Space Race with *Sputnik 1*, the first satellite, and *Sputnik 2*, which housed Laika the dog. The US desperately wanted to shift momentum away from their Cold War enemy. That's where Project A119 came in.

The proposal: to detonate a nuclear device on the Moon. Innocently titled *A Study of Lunar Research Flights*, it had the air of scientific purpose. Headed by physicist Leonard Reiffel, planetary physics expert Gerard Kuiper and a young Carl Sagan before his career as a TV scientist, it argued that an explosion could provide information about the lunar atmosphere. But the real reason for Project A119 was a display of military force.

It was shelved – as was the Soviets' similar plan – due to the risk of mistakes, damage to future lunar exploration caused by contamination, and the chance it would be a propaganda damp squib anyway. There wouldn't even be a mushroom cloud in the Moon's vacuum.

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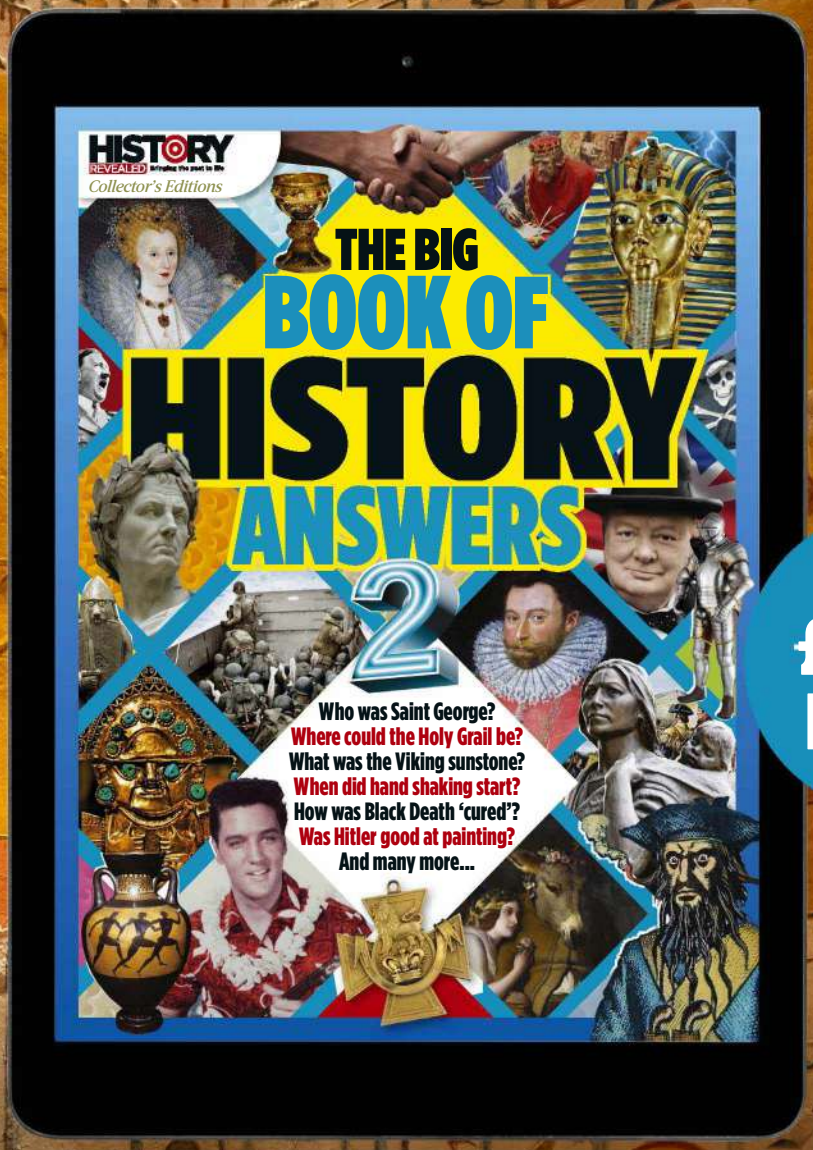

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ONE TO WATCH

World on Fire's second series sees Jonah Hauer-King reprising his role as British interpreter Harry Chase, who escapes Poland and joins the Special Operations Executive

Julia Brown also returns to play Lois Bennett – Harry Chase's Mancunian girlfriend from series one

Blazing on

World on Fire / BBC One, July

Lost momentum, other commitments, stories that suddenly seem dated. The pandemic, it's safe to say, was behind the cancellation of more than a few TV projects. And for a while, you might have guessed that *World on Fire*, writer Peter Bowker's World War II epic, would be another Covid-19 casualty.

Then, last year, the BBC announced that a second series was in production. For which give thanks because it's a drama that's ambitious, compelling and, as an ensemble piece aiming to tell the story of the conflict from the perspective of those caught up in events and often simply struggling just to survive, very different in tone to most dramas set during wartime.

For those who may have missed the series first time around, *World on Fire*, which first aired back in 2019 and is available to catch up via BBC iPlayer, began in 1939. As that date suggests, it focused in great part on the Nazi invasion of Poland, a prelude to the German *Blitzkrieg* through western Europe.

The new episodes pick up in 1940 and several characters return from first time around. They include Harry Chase (Jonah Hauer-King), a former interpreter at the British embassy in Warsaw who escapes Poland to join the Special Operations Executive (SOE); his wealthy mother, Robina (Lesley Manville); and Kasia Tomaszeski (Zofia Wichłacz), Harry's Polish lover, a waitress who becomes part of the resistance.

New characters range from David (Gregg Sulkin), an RAF pilot who is brave yet takes too many risks, to Marga (Miriam Schiweck), indoctrinated into the cult of Nazism and a devoted member of the Band of German Maidens, the girls' wing of the Hitler Youth. The new episodes will cover the Blitz, life in occupied Europe and the early months of the long battle for North Africa, which we see in part from the perspective of Rajib (Ahad Raza Mir), the leader of a specialist unit of the British Indian Army.

BBC/MAMMOTH SCREEN X2

WEEKLY TV & RADIO
Visit ***historyextra.com*** for updates on upcoming TV and radio programmes

Films like *The Producers* (1967) are among the works discussed in David Schneider's new BBC Radio 4 documentary on Jewish comedy

Bettany Hughes' new Channel 4 offering sees her seeking out archaeological, architectural and cultural treasures across the Indian subcontinent

Subcontinental travelogue

Exploring India's Treasures with Bettany Hughes / Channel 4, July

Never a classicist to spend time at home with her books when she could be out exploring, Bettany Hughes returns to TV screens this summer with a new two-part travelogue that takes her to India. While Hughes' recent *Treasures of the World* series put the emphasis on how archaeology is changing our understanding of the ancient world, the focus here is on cultural history and traditions.

The first programme, which mainly looks at religion and spiritual matters, begins in Varanasi. It's a holy city famous for its Burning Ghat, a site where Hindu pilgrims cremate their deceased and where a fire has been burning for perhaps thousands of years. Varanasi is also where Hughes takes part in an emotional ceremony to mark the passing of her own mother, who died a few months before filming began.

As Hughes continues her exploration of northern India, highlights include a visit to New Delhi to learn about Sufism, a mystical strand of Islam, and an exploration of the history of the Taj Mahal, originally commissioned by the fifth Mughal emperor, Shahjahan (1592–1666) in honour of his favourite wife, who died giving birth.

For the second show, Hughes travels in the south of India and the focus shifts to different regional histories. Her travels take her to Hampi in Karnataka to see a spectacular abandoned city and, ascending via India's steepest railway, to a hill station in the Nilgiri Mountains to meet the women of the indigenous Toda people.

Throughout, Hughes meets local experts and guides, who help her understand the nuances of what she's seeing.

In the first episode, Hughes pays an emotional visit to the holy city of Varanasi – famous for its cremation rituals

Laughter as resistance

Shticks and Stones: Jewish Comedy and Antisemitism / BBC Radio 4, July

Jewish entertainers have long used humour to deflect and to counter prejudice, but how has this comedy evolved over the years and how should we understand its interplay with antisemitism?

It's a cultural history related in the *Archive on 4* slot by actor and scriptwriter David Schneider, who begins in 1903 with American-born comedian Julian Rose, who found huge success in the UK despite his work resting so heavily on stereotypes that he was billed as "Our Hebrew Friend".

Via Yiddish theatre, Sid Caesar, Danny Kaye, Mel Brooks' gloriously tasteless 'Springtime for Hitler' from *The Producers*, *Seinfeld*, Sacha Baron Cohen's *Borat* and *Friday Night Dinner*, Schneider traces the story up to the present day as he meets the comperes of the Jewish LGBTQ+ club night Buttmitzvah.

John Henry Phillips, Chloë Duckworth, Hugh Dennis and Natasha Billson (*left to right*) return for more archaeological adventures, with Dennis (*also shown right*) only too happy get stuck in

CHANNEL 4 X4, UNIVERSAL PICTURES X2, GETTY IMAGES X1, © 2021 STARZ ENTERTAINMENT, LLC X1

Murphy pictured in a scene with Emily Blunt, who plays Oppenheimer's wife, Katherine

Dawn of the nuclear age

Oppenheimer / In cinemas from Friday 21 July

On 16 July 1945, a group of scientists and military personnel gathered in the Jornada del Muerto desert, New Mexico. Following years of work led by J Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Los Alamos Laboratory and a central figure in the Manhattan Project, they were about to witness the detonation of the world's first atomic weapon in a top-secret test codenamed 'Trinity'.

Years later, Oppenheimer, a theoretical physicist who also possessed a rare combination of administrative ability, engineering knowledge and ambition, reflected on what his team had achieved. The awe-inspiring sight of the world's first nuclear explosion brought to mind, he said, words from the Hindu scripture *Bhagavad Gita*, which he translated as, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

It's a quote that captures both the sheer scale of Oppenheimer's achievement and its inescapable moral dimension. In August, seeking to hasten the end of World War II, the US detonated atomic weapons over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

How to portray such a singular life on film? In a big-budget biopic, director Christopher Nolan (*Dunkirk*, *Tenet*) takes the approach of showing us events largely from Oppenheimer's own perspective, that of a man operating under enormous pressure at the cutting edge of science and with no guarantees of success.

Leading an all-star cast as Oppenheimer is Cillian Murphy, while Nolan's cachet as a filmmaker means the A-list likes of Emily Blunt, Matt Damon, Robert Downey Jr, Florence Pugh, Gary Oldman and Kenneth Branagh also appear. The visual effects, which utilise real explosives rather than CGI, are spectacular. To quote Murphy: "You have to see this in the cinema on the biggest f***ing screen possible."

Christopher Nolan's explosive new biopic stars Cillian Murphy as the theoretical physicist at the heart of World War II's Manhattan Project

Excavating the past

The Great British Dig: History in Your Back Garden / More 4 and streaming via Channel 4, from June

If archaeology is, to judge by what its practitioners say, often a case of conducting painstaking work while the weather does its best to make you miserable, it can nevertheless be a remarkably entertaining spectator sport. Especially when Hugh Dennis and co rock up in the neighbourhood to dig up the roses and petunias in search of the history that lies beneath.

Kicking off back in June, the latest series of *The Great British Dig* has been as entertaining as ever. The first episode took Dennis and the team to Cornwall and the site of a recently rediscovered Roman fort near the village of Calstock. Little is known about what drew the Romans so far west, so this is a precious opportunity to try and gain new knowledge.

Another episode features an excavation at the Studley Royal Water Garden, commissioned by John Aislabie (1670 1742), a fabulously rich chancellor of the Exchequer who was disgraced when the South Sea Company, which he had heavily promoted, collapsed while under his watch. A mansion once stood in Aislabie's grandest of gardens and the team wants to excavate to learn how the other half would have lived in Georgian England.

Tudor powerplays

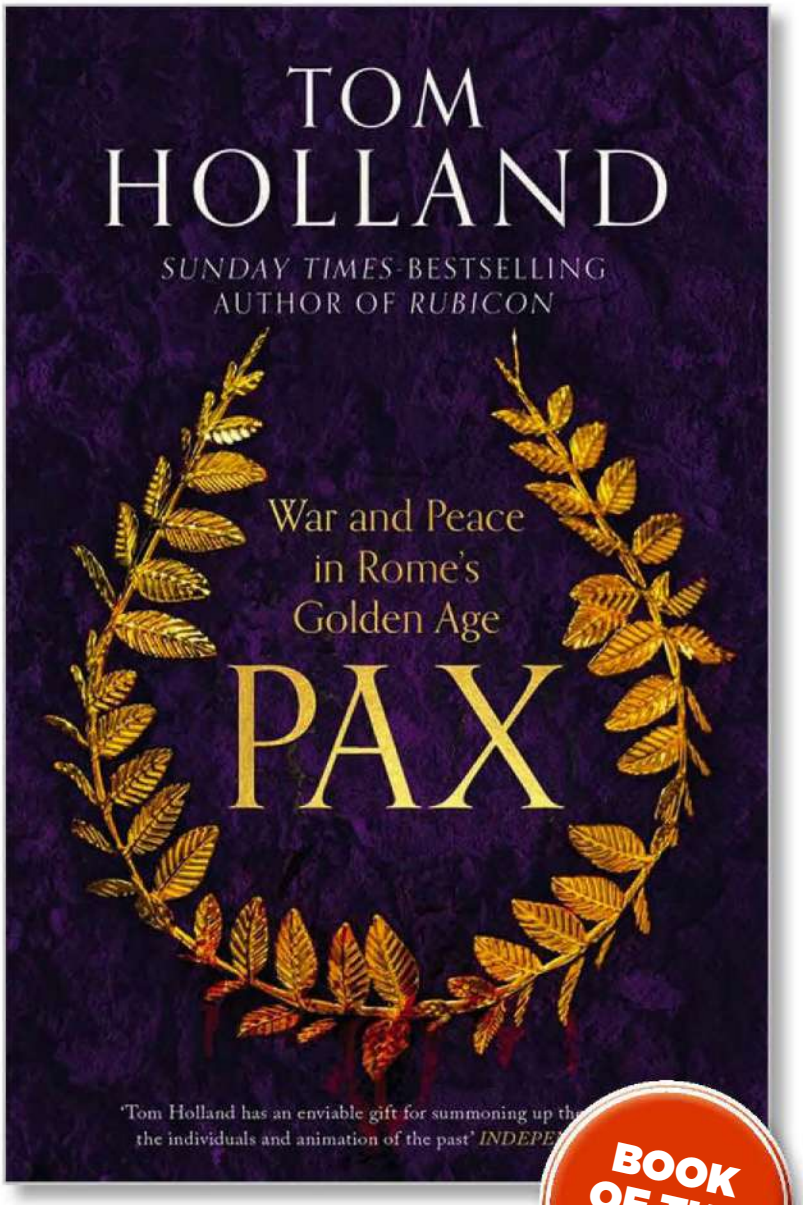
Becoming Elizabeth / Channel 4, summer

Charting the life of Henry VIII's second daughter in the wake of the monarch's death, writer Anya Reiss's drama makes it clear from the off that Elizabeth Tudor lived in times when high politics and religion were linked in dangerous ways.

The first and only series (sadly, it was cancelled stateside by broadcaster Starz last year) covers the reign of the boy king Edward VI. Alicia von Rittberg (*pictured*) stars as the teenage Elizabeth, Romola Garai as Mary Tudor, Jessica Raine as Catherine Parr and Tom Cullen as Thomas Seymour, a charmer who abuses his power.

BOOKS & PODCASTS

THIS MONTH'S BEST HISTORICAL READS AND LISTENS



BOOK OF THE MONTH

Pax: War and Peace in Rome's Golden Age

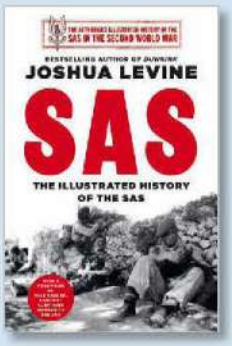
By Tom Holland
Abacus, £30, hardback, 448 pages

Welcome to the Roman empire at its height: incredibly wealthy, intimidatingly powerful and, to modern eyes, often intensely alien. Historian and broadcaster Tom Holland is our guide to a dynasty that spanned decades from the end of the first century AD and a vast sweep of territory from the Atlantic to Arabia. Yet this glittering world of stability and prosperity was both made possible by, and held together by, the threat of violence. This is an incisive, accessible account of a fascinating era.

SAS: The Illustrated History of the SAS

By Joshua Levine
William Collins, £25, hardback, 320 pages

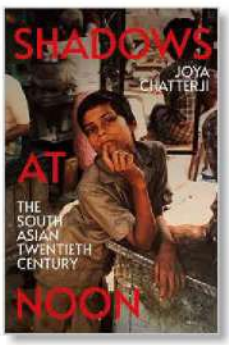
Intriguingly, the Special Air Service, or SAS, was borne out of a lie, conceived to convince Britain's World War II opponents of the existence of an elite paratrooper unit. This fake battalion soon gave its name to the newly formed, genuine SAS, which became known for its daring exploits and gruelling training programme. Joshua Levine's vibrant, fully authorised account draws on previously untapped archive material to bring to life the individuals who transformed fantasy into reality and, in the process, played a key role in shaping the war's outcome.

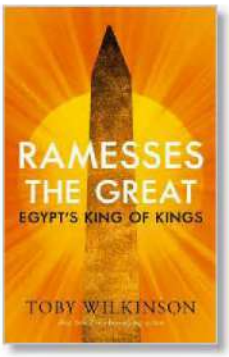


Shadows at Noon: The South Asian Twentieth Century

By Joya Chatterji
Bodley Head, £30, hardback, 864 pages

This bold, ambitious book charts the ways in which South Asia gained independence from the British empire, and the opportunities and disasters that awaited the new nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh throughout the second half of the 20th century. As well as chronicling decades of often brutal politics, Joya Chatterji also switches focus to explore the experiences of individual people and the social and cultural dimensions – food, cinema, wrestling – that reveal the diverse, complex stories of life in the region.





Ramesses the Great: Egypt's King of Kings

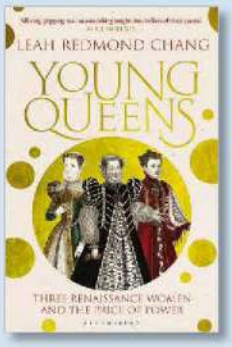
By Toby Wilkinson
Yale University Press, £18.99, hardback, 240 pages

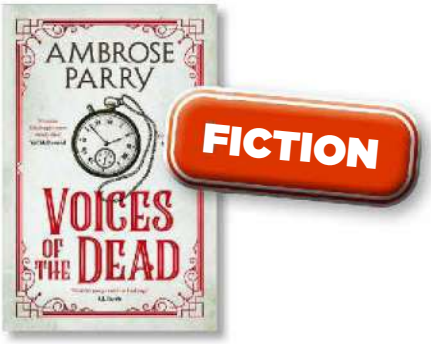
For any self-respecting pharaoh, excess was key. Ramesses II, for instance – who ruled from 1279 to 1213 BC – could claim more monuments, and more children, than any of his peers. Yet given that those other rulers achieved equal or greater success on other terms, why has this 'King of Kings' become so exalted? Toby Wilkinson's entertaining biography explores that question, suggesting that self-promotion was key – and that this ancient hype man's story may hold lessons for us today.

Young Queens: Three Renaissance Women and the Price of Power

By Leah Redmond Chang
Bloomsbury Circus, £25, hardback, 512 pages

This joint biography traces the intertwined fortunes of three women – Mary, Queen of Scots, Catherine de Medici and Elisabeth de Valois – across the 16th century, from their time together as young women in the French court to their respective roles as queens of Scotland, France and Spain. It vividly illuminates their ambitions, motivations and fears, as well as the overwhelming odds and difficult choices faced by female rulers in an era of male power and shifting allegiances.





Voices of the Dead: A Raven and Fisher Mystery

By Ambrose Parry
Canongate Books, £16.99, hardback, 416 pages

The popular series of historical crime novels written by Ambrose Parry – a pseudonym for husband-and-wife team Chris Brookmyre and Marisa Haetzman – here reaches its fourth entry. It's 1853, a paradoxical time of great scientific innovation and fascination with the spirit world, and a murderer is on the loose in Edinburgh. With the first instalment, *The Way of All Flesh*, set to be adapted for TV, this is a great time to catch up with the exploits of daring duo Will Raven and Sarah Fisher.

PODCAST WHAT TO LISTEN TO...

Each month we bring you three of our favourite podcasts from the BBC and HistoryExtra

Amazing archaeological discoveries

bit.ly/AmazingPod123

Whip-wielding archaeologist Indiana Jones returns to our screens this summer – and while the character's adventures remain the stuff of fantasy, his real-life counterparts have thrilling tales of their own to tell. Historian Michael Scott shares some of those stories, and discusses the extent to which fictional treasure hunters reflect reality.

The History Hour: Inuit children and more

bit.ly/HistoryHourPod123

This compendium of BBC Radio's history output reliably offers an eclectic look at the past, and this episode is no exception. From the stories of the Inuit children removed from their families during the 20th century to an unlikely race pitting runners against riders on horseback, it's by turns moving and amusing – but always fascinating.

Historical echoes of the Ukraine war

bit.ly/UkrainePod123

Tracing the history of current events as they unfold is always tricky, particularly when they're as consequential and upsetting as the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia. Here, Serhii Plokhy discusses why it remains important to do so, and highlights some of the key events that have informed, and help us make sense of, the current conflict.

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ON THE PODCAST

AUDIO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HISTORYEXTRA TEAM

NEW SERIES

DEATH OF A DICTATOR

How did Julius Caesar's demise shape history? In a new *HistoryExtra* podcast series, **Rob Attar** is joined by experts to examine the dictator's life and career – spanning his ruthless ambitions, dalliance with Cleopatra, and the impact of his assassination on Roman politics. Read below for a summary of all six episodes...

EPISODE 1: BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH

Julius Caesar, at the height of his powers, became the victim of a brutal assassination by senators on 15 March 44 BC. Professor Barry Strauss describes the momentous events of a day that would transform Rome forever.

EPISODE 2: WAS THIS AMBITION?

Born into a minor Roman noble family, few could have imagined the extraordinary destiny that awaited Caesar. Professors Catherine Steel and Philip Freeman examine the man's early life and trace the origins of his voracious aspirations.

EPISODE 3: MASTER OF HIS FATE

Delve into the final decade of Caesar's life: a tumultuous era of civil war, megalomania and his romance with Cleopatra. Professor Philip Freeman, Dr Jane Draycott and Dr Volker Heuchert chart the climactic events that defined Caesar's later career.

EPISODE 4: HONOURABLE MEN

Meet the men at the heart of the conspiracy to thwart Caesar's designs. Professors Barry Strauss and Philip Freeman examine the characters of Brutus, Cassius and Decimus, and explain how the bold plot to save the Roman Republic from tyranny unfolded.

EPISODE 5: THE DOGS OF WAR

In the wake of Caesar's assassination, the Roman world was thrown into further chaos. Dr Volker Heuchert joins Philip Freeman and Barry Strauss to consider how his former allies and sworn enemies clashed over the future of Rome.

EPISODE 6: THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

To conclude, Dr Jane Draycott considers the rise of Caesar's heir, Octavian, and his climactic showdown with Mark Antony and Cleopatra. Meanwhile, Philip Freeman, Catherine Steel and Barry Strauss reflect on the legacy of Caesar's assassination.

HISTORY EXTRA PODCAST

Listen to the series at *historyextra.com/caesarpodcast*. To stream hundreds of other episodes on a whole host of historical topics, visit *historyextra.com/podcast* or find us on platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

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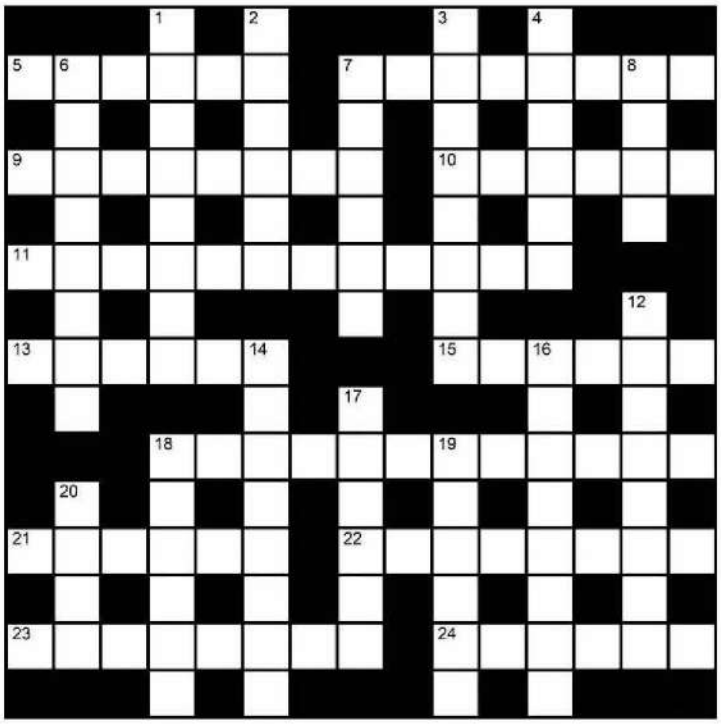
ACROSS

5 Annie ___ (1860–1926), US sharpshooter (6)
7 Lindsay ___ (1923–94), British filmmaker, best known for *If...* (1968) (8)
9 In Greek myth, a shipmate of Jason (8)
10 Nodule of knapped flint (6)
11 US resort, developed in the 19th century by Jonathan Pitney (8,4)
13 Midwestern Sioux tribe (6)
15 Texas city in which John F Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 (6)
18 In Christian tradition, the first day of Lent (3,9)
21 City in India, site of a major chemical leak in 1984 (6)
22 Rock band formed in 1980 by former members of Joy Division (3,5)
23 Nicola ___ (b1970), first minister of Scotland between 2014 and 2023 (8)
24 Prophet and military leader, in the Book of Judges (6)

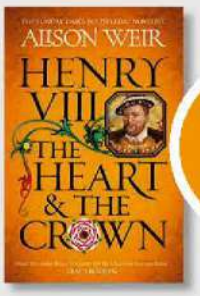


Set by Richard Smyth

DOWN

1 Fabled city of gold (2,6)
2 Cousin of Juliet, in *Romeo and Juliet* (6)
3 Name given to New York International Airport from 1948 to 1963 (8)
4 1895 novel by George du Maurier (6)
6 City in Punjab, site of a 1919 massacre (8)
7 Historical region of Greece (6)
8 Name shared by three 10th-century Holy Roman Emperors (4)
12 José Luis Rodríguez ___ (b1960), Spanish prime minister from 2004 to 2011 (8)
14 Legendary Greek hero (8)
16 1954 film by Federico Fellini (2,6)
17 John ___ (1940–80), Beatle (6)
18 André-Marie ___ (1775–1836), French electrodynamics pioneer (6)
19 Term for spiritual practices in vogue in the west since the 1970s (3,3)
20 ___ Baker (1929–88), US jazz trumpeter (4)

CHANCE TO WIN



BOOK WORTH £25 FOR THREE WINNERS

Henry VIII: The Heart & The Crown
by Alison Weir

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Post entries to **BBC History Revealed, August 2023 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to **august2023@historyrevealedcomps.co.uk** by noon on **1 September 2023**.

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We will post your prizes out as soon as possible.

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BBC HISTORY REVEALED

ISSUE 123 – AUGUST 2023
BBC History Revealed is published by Immediate Media Company London Limited under licence from BBC Studios who help fund new BBC programmes

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Basic annual subscription rates
UK £64.87 **Eire/Europe** £67.99
ROW £69.00

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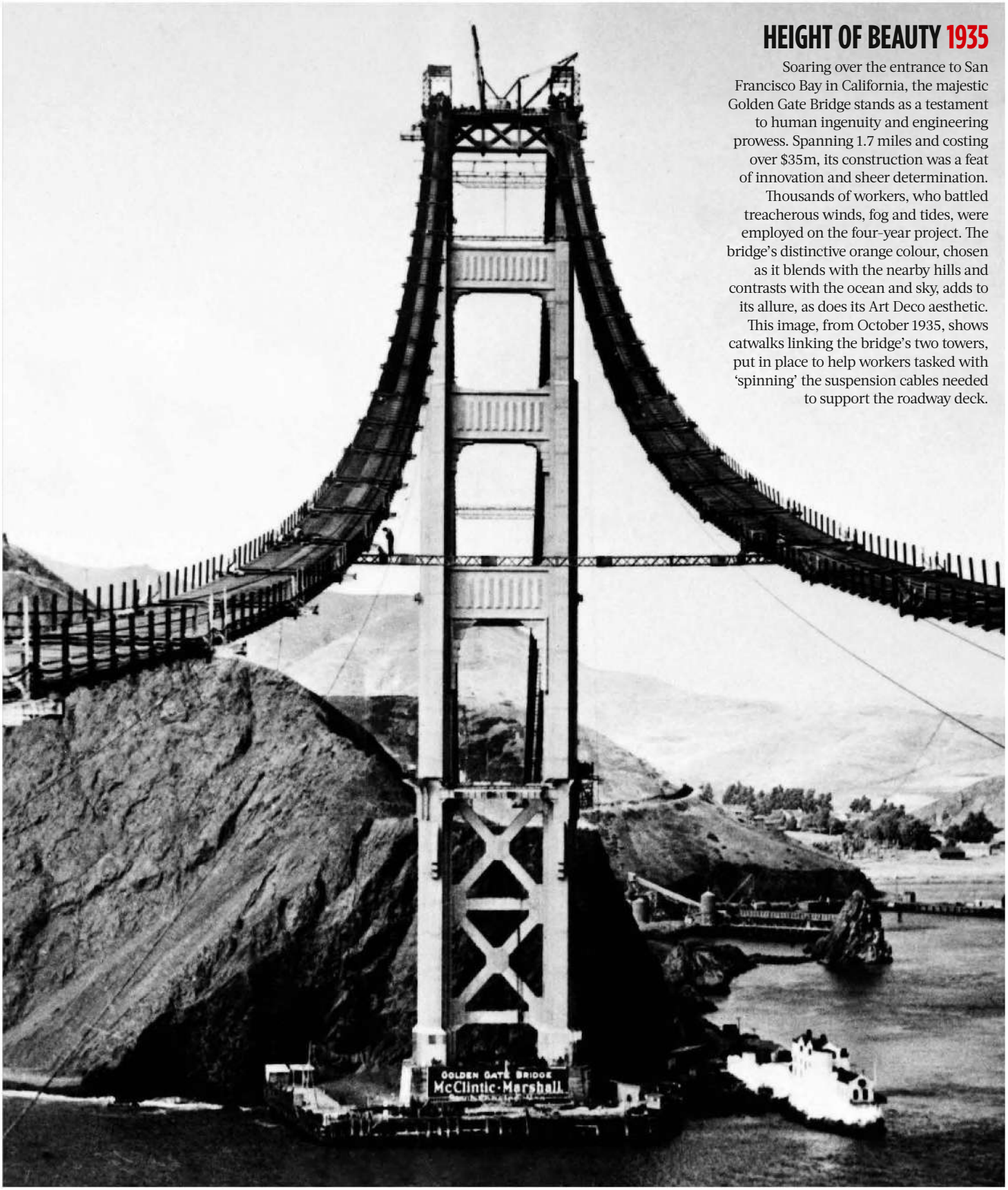

HEIGHT OF BEAUTY 1935

Soaring over the entrance to San Francisco Bay in California, the majestic Golden Gate Bridge stands as a testament to human ingenuity and engineering prowess. Spanning 1.7 miles and costing over $35m, its construction was a feat of innovation and sheer determination. Thousands of workers, who battled treacherous winds, fog and tides, were employed on the four-year project. The bridge's distinctive orange colour, chosen as it blends with the nearby hills and contrasts with the ocean and sky, adds to its allure, as does its Art Deco aesthetic. This image, from October 1935, shows catwalks linking the bridge's two towers, put in place to help workers tasked with 'spinning' the suspension cables needed to support the roadway deck.

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This was Sylvia's promise to you...

A generation ago, a woman named Sylvia made a promise. As a doctor's secretary, she'd watched stroke destroy the lives of so many people. She was determined to make sure we could all live in a world where we're far less likely to lose our lives to stroke.

She kept her promise, and a gift to the Stroke Association was included in her Will. Sylvia's gift helped fund the work that made sure many more of us survive stroke now than did in her lifetime.

Sylvia changed the story for us all. Now it's our turn to change the story for those who'll come after us.

Stroke still shatters lives and tears families apart. And for so many survivors the road to recovery is still long and desperately lonely. If you or someone you love has been affected by stroke – you'll know just what that means.

But it doesn't have to be like this. You can change the story, just like Sylvia did, with a gift in your Will. All it takes is a promise.

You can promise future generations a world where researchers discover new treatments and surgeries and every single stroke survivor has the best care, rehabilitation and support network possible, to help them rebuild their lives.

Will you make that promise to generations to come? Please, leave a gift in your Will to the Stroke Association.

Find out how by calling 020 7566 1505
or email legacy@stroke.org.uk
or visit stroke.org.uk/legacy

Rebuilding lives after stroke

The Stroke Association is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789).
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